

Natsumi, The Magical Girl Part 1

by Richard Beaubien

Category: Ranma

Genre: Humor

Language: English

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2000-05-20 09:00:00

Updated: 2001-01-29 09:00:00

Packaged: 2016-04-27 18:11:32

Rating: K+

Chapters: 6

Words: 49,668

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: Kasumi becomes a magical girl and fights against the evil Rubber suited monsters of the BFC...

1. Episode 1 - Shock, Can Kasumi Save the W...

>Natsumi, The Magical Girl

>Tokyo, Japan: Nerima district. Sometime in the past...

>It was a beautiful spring afternoon. A bell signalled the end of
another school day. Just within the school gate, Mrs. Tendo waited

>for her eldest daughter to come as she normally did each schoolday.
She had no reason to believe that anything would be wrong; any moment

>now little Kasumi would be running into her arms, happily presenting
her with what she had made in school today.

>
But instead, Kasumi was crying. Concerned, Mrs. Tendo picked her

>daughter up. "What's the matter, Kasumi-chan?"

>Kasumi sobbed. "Everyone made fun of me at school today, Mommy..."
"Why would they do that, Kasumi-chan?"

>
"Because I said I wanted to be a magical girl! A warrior for

>justice! Like the girls in Mahou Senshi Stardust... and everyone
just laughed at me!"

>
Mrs. Tendo hugged her daughter, running a hand through Kasumi's long

>brown hair. "There, there," she spoke soothingly. "It's all right.
Don't listen to those kids. You know, you can be anything you want

>if you put your mind to it."

>"I can?" Kasumi abruptly stopped sobbing. "Even a magical girl?"
Mrs. Tendo looked into Kasumi's inquiring eyes. "Yes. Even

a

>magical girl."

>"All right! Can I have a magical brooch, too?"

>"Of course, dear." She set Kasumi down.

>"Yahoo!!" Kasumi exclaimed, as they began to walk home.
There
wasn't a trace of sadness left within her eyes. With a
little help
>from her mother, she could do anything.

>Including being a magical girl.

> Richard Beaubien

> Presents

> Natsumi, the Magical Girl
 (wildly and quickly embellished by
Mike Koos)
>
 Episode 1: Shock! Can Kasumi Save The World?
>
Nabiki was busying herself with closely studying the business
news in
>the daily paper. It wasn't quite the trade papers, but for
Nabiki's
purposes it would do. For the moment, anyway.
>
The day's news offered a note of interest to her - the BFC, an

>up-and-coming major corporation was building a branch office in
the
area. Always on the lookout for a good business opportunity,
Nabiki

>wondered if there wasn't some way she could profit from
this
particular bit of information.
>
That was when Akane screamed.
>
Everyone in the house rushed to Akane's side in the foyer.

"What's
>wrong, Akane?" Nabiki thought to ask. Akane was holding a
small
package, her hands trembling.
>
"This just came in the mail," Akane said, her voice distant.

"It's
>addressed to me, Nabiki and Kasumi." She offered the package
to
Kasumi. "It's from... from Mom..."
>
Kasumi reluctantly took the package and tore away the brown
paper
>wrapping. "Oh, my..." she started, examining the box's contents.

Inside were three items carefully wrapped in cloth.

>
Nabiki's curiosity got the better of her. "What is it?"

>
Akane peered into the box. "There's a letter," she said, fishing
out

>the folded piece of paper. "Let's see what it says."

>"To my beautiful daughters, Kasumi, Nabiki and Akane," Akane
read
aloud. "By the time you read this letter, I will likely have
passed

>away. I have known well in advance that I cannot prevent this,
and
thought that these gifts were the least I could do to help you

>remember me as you continue on your journey into adulthood."
"To
this end, I have arranged for this package to be sent to you once

>the three of you come of age. I hope this package does not
arrive
before that time, but if it does, promise me that you will
always

>remember me in your hearts."

>"To Akane, my youngest daughter: I believe you are the one
most
likely to follow in the family tradition of martial arts and
make

>your dear father proud. For you, I have made this training gi. I
do
hope you like it."

>
"Don't tell your father this, but I have envisioned you becoming

a
>talented cook as well as a martial artist."

>Ranma snorted, and Akane caught it, pausing to glare at him.

Meanwhile, Kasumi removed Akane's gi from the package and set it

>aside.

>"To Nabiki, I leave this junior business set. Even though as I
write
this, you are but a little girl, I can see that you have a
fondness
>for business. I am reminded of the time your teacher told me you
had
been cheating all of your classmates out of their money. When
I took
>you into my lap and asked you about it, you told me you were
hoping
to make it big with an investment on the stock market."

>
"I can only imagine you now, helping everyone keep the finances
of
>the Tendo Dojo and household in proper order."

>Kasumi handed the business set to Nabiki, who almost seemed not
to
know what to do with it.
>
"Finally, to Kasumi, my eldest daughter: I leave you this
heirloom
>brooch and a reminder... Remember, you can always be anything
you
want to be if you put your mind to it. I have always had
complete
>faith in all of you. Please remember that I love you, and I'm
sorry
I couldn't be here to give you these gifts in person."

>
As Akane finished reading the letter, she risked a glance in her

>father's direction. "...Otousan...?" But Soun was too wound up
to
answer, flooding the small room with his tears. Akane felt as
though
>she might cry a little, herself. Ranma and Genma were off to
one
side now, silently watching.
>
Akane carefully folded the letter and placed it back into the
box.
>That done, she unwrapped the gi her mother had meant for her.
Sewn
in great detail on the back was a small work of sewing art...
a
>landscape depicting the mountains that were once fully visible
from
the Tendo yard. It was beautiful, and surely must have taken
a long
>time to complete...

>Nabiki was still looking at the business set in her hands. She
was
determined not to let anyone see her cry. That would be a sign
of
>weakness.

>Wordlessly, Kasumi pinned her new brooch to the front of her
blouse
and headed up the stairs, the brooch catching a bit of the
light from
>upstairs as she did so.

>"Well," Nabiki spoke into the silence, chuckling uneasily. "I've
got
business to do! Later!" She hurried upstairs to her room and
locked
>the door.

>The junior business set rested on her desk. Why was she feeling
this
way? She had already bought more expensive versions of
everything in
>the set, long ago...

>Nabiki fell backward onto her bed and cried. "Mom....."

> *****

>"Mother?"
Kasumi repeated the call, though she wasn't sure why she was making
>it to begin with.

>She stood in an open field, her vision nearly obscured by a strange,
thick fog hanging in the air. She could almost feel the grass under
>her sandals; that alone was comforting.

>Straining, she made out the shape of someone approaching through the
mist. Who could it be? But then, why was she here? She was

>beginning to worry...

>"Kasumi-chan... Remember, you can be anything you want if you put
your mind to it. You can do anything you want..."

>
"Mother!!" cried Kasumi.
>
"You must use the brooch. You can do it... I have complete faith in
>you."

>"**MOTHER!!**" Kasumi yelled. She tried to will the tears out of her
eyes as she ran toward the mysterious figure. But the figure receded
>into the dark fog and vanished. All that remained was Kasumi, on her
knees, calling out in desperation...
>
Kasumi instantly sat up in bed, her pulse racing. Had it all been a
>nightmare?
"Oh, my..."
>

>
"Hello! I'm the official Nerima representative for BFC," the

>spokeswoman gushed. The company had apparently spared no expense to
announce their arrival in town. "You'll be glad to know that we plan
>to work with the community's best interests in mind. Your successes
are our successes, after all! In fact, to kick off our 'grand
>opening' here, we're hosting a search for models for our new line of
products. If you happen to be a skilled martial artist, then drop by
>our talent contest at the community center tomorrow at nine and
prepare to become a star."
>
The spokeswoman smiled to herself. This was going to be easy; soon
>phase one of the master plan would be complete.

> *****

>Martial artists?
All right!! I can make a killing here! Nabiki thought, looking
>for her two favorite assets - Ranma and Akane. She finally found
them arguing away in the dojo as per usual. "Hey, have I got some
>news for you..." she announced cheerfully.

>"What is it, oneechan?" Akane studied her sister. Whenever Nabiki
was this happy it often meant she had some sort of scheme in mind.
>Akane had no intention of getting caught up in another one of her
sister's plots.
>
"You know that company, BFC? They're looking for martial artists to
>be their new spokespeople and I bet you two would be perfect for

the
job."

>
"Sure," Ranma replied, "but what's in it for you?"

>
Nabiki sighed. They were finally starting to wise up to her schemes.

>She would have to be a bit more subtle if she wanted to get any money
out of them, and subtlety just happened to be a skill of hers.

>
"I'll be your agent and take a mere sixty percent off the top to help

>pay off your debts to me, Ranma."

>"Wait a minute," Akane countered. "Why can't we do the job by
ourselves and pay off Ranma's debt to you without you getting even

>more money out of the deal?"

>"Simple," Nabiki said in a voice that told them she'd already made
all of the decisions. "You need an agent to look out for your best

>interests. After all, show business is a vicious business!"
Ranma had to laugh at Nabiki's feigned sincerity. "Don't you mean,

>'look out for *your* best interests?'"

>"Why, I'm shocked, Ranma-kun! I wouldn't do a thing to hurt my own
family!" Nabiki said in her best hurt voice. She looked across at

>the pair she was trying to con and found she was making no progress.

"Oh, all right - a seventy-thirty split in your favor."

>
"We'll take it!" Akane exclaimed before Ranma could object. It was

>a rare occasion when she could claim the better part of one of
Nabiki's deals. If, in fact, she had a choice in the matter.

>
"Okay. Here are the papers; just sign on the lines and you're in."

>Nabiki made sure to hide the sly smile on her face while the two
martial artists signed the contracts.

>
"Thanks a lot, oneechan!" Akane yelled, dragging Ranma out of the

>dojo. Nabiki could see the small smile on her younger sister's face.
So, Akane thought she had the upper hand, eh?

>
She quickly scanned through the contracts to be safe and allowed

>herself the luxury of a sinister laugh. True, she had given up a
good portion of the short-term profits, but she now held the

>exclusive marketing rights to Ranma and Akane's images. She knew
from keeping an eye on Hollywood that marketing was the real driving

>force. In fact, not many people knew it, but Nabiki had had the
foresight to invest in _Jurassic Park_...

>
Besides, if she truly felt like being compassionate, she could give

>Ranma and Akane a decent share of the money - after she took BFC for
all she could. Nabiki laughed. This might be a profitable week for

>her after all.

> *****

>The spokeswoman examined every last detail of the community center
closely. The trap had to be properly set. Her leader definitely

>would not accept failure. She had no desire to fail her

leader.
"*Report!*" a loud voice snapped curtly from a nearby television
>monitor. The youma spokeswoman stood at attention in front of the
screen. "Yes, my Lady?"
>
"How goes the preparation for project Z?"
>
"All is in readiness."
>
"Excellent! Continue the good work!" The voice became silent.
The
>youma smiled, inspecting the trap one more time. If this plan
fared
well she would be well rewarded with more responsibility,
more power,
>plus a good stock plan and maybe even a tax attorney.

> *****

>Kasumi found herself meandering through the fog again. This
time,
when the mystery figure approached, she was too frightened
to speak.
>She simply stood rooted to one spot, trying to listen to what
the
figure said. Unfortunatly, Kasumi awoke before the dream ran
its
>course. The dream faded back into her subconscious.

> *****

>"C'mon! Aren't you two ready yet?" Nabiki banged on the stair
rail.

>"Don't worry! We'll be down in a minute!" Akane called back.

>Nabiki frowned, tapping her foot impatiently. Time was money,
and
they couldn't afford to be late. If any of the other 'real'
martial
>artists in town decided to look into the talent contest...

>"We're ready, oneechan!" Akane beamed as she and Ranma descended
the
stairs. They were similarly dressed in matching stylized
outfits
>much like the ones they had worn while facing off against the
Golden
Pair, Mikado Sanzenin and Azusa Shiratori.
>
"Wow, you two look cute!"
>
"Oh, *right*, Nabiki. I feel like an idiot. Why do we have to
wear
>these costumes, anyway?"

>"I really don't care what you feel like, as long as you get
that
part. Got it?"
>
"Oh, all right," Ranma muttered, resigning himself. "Let's just
get
>this over with."

>They headed out the door.

>Kasumi caught a glimpse of the trio as they left the yard. She
hoped
that things would turn out for the better. After all, if
they landed
>the part, Akane and Ranma stood a chance of becoming big stars.
Yet,
why did she have an odd feeling something would go wrong?
Kasumi
>suddenly decided she ought to pay a visit to the community center.

It was on the way to Tofu-sensei's clinic, where she would be
headed
>in about an hour or two, anyway.

> *****

>There was certainly nothing about the community center that
looked
out of place - but then again, didn't all sterotypical evil
monster
>traps tend to look perfectly harmless before they were

triggered?
>Nabiki wasn't interested in the surroundings however - she was busy
>sizing up the competition, which didn't amount to much in her
>opinion. Apparently most of those who had come to be 'discovered'
>were would-be idol singers. Anyone who actually looked like a
>martial artist paled when she compared them to Ranma or Akane.

>Now, all Nabiki had to do was get the BFC to sign her papers...
>and poof! she would be on her way to controlling one of the most

>powerful corporations in Japan.
>The youma watched the people assembled in the hall. Only two of
>those people truly carried themselves like martial artists, which,
>amazingly enough, pleased the youma. This might make her job easier
>to do. She walked casually up to Nabiki, who had already established
>herself as the agent of the pair of martial artists. Once she dealt with these three, she would proceed with phase two of
>the plan.
>"So, you're their agent, are you? We might be interested in making a
>deal... What's your price?"
>Nabiki had a wry smile on her face. She figured she had the

>advantage, and decided to press it. "You'll like it. Here, take a
>look for yourself." Nabiki handed the contracts to the youma.

>"I guess we can live with this deal," the youma was satisfied.
As Nabiki, Akane and Ranma watched, she signed the papers. First a

>major corporation, Nabiki thought, then the rest of the world...
>"We have our models!" the youma announced. "Thank you all for

>coming. We'll let you know if we can use you." And we will,
>eventually.

>The assembly left the building, grumbling to themselves. The youma

>spokeswoman finally turned to the pair of martial artists and their
>agent. "Now, what we need from our martial-artist spokespeople isn't

>just skill, but a good likability factor. We need someone who can
>sell Dark Kingdom pogs to the general public!"

>"Pogs? You're using martial artists to sell *pogs*!?" Nabiki asked

>in disbelief.

>"Why, of course we are. Well, let's get you two into our little
>training arena so we can test your skill..."

>"Okay!" Akane started toward the testing arena. Looking back, she

>saw that Ranma hadn't budged and decided to drag him into the arena
>instead.

>Nabiki shook her head; she was going to have to teach her stars how

>to behave around their clients. At least all the contracts had been
>signed.

>"And now, for you, Nabiki Tendo..." Laughing, the youma turned her

>back on Nabiki. She was going to handle this agent

>wanna-be personally. Whoever said she wasn't allowed to have some

fun before

>the actual plan was underway? She revealed her true youma form.

"I
think we should close this deal with a *bang*!"

>
All Nabiki could do was scream. It was, after all, cliched dialogue.

>

>
Meanwhile, Kasumi was enjoying a walk home after completing her

>errands and a quick - yet always interesting - visit to Tofu-sensei's
clinic. She'd taken pleasure in the fact that everyone who noticed

>her couldn't help but admire her new brooch, as well. It was a
beautiful day to be outside... yet Kasumi felt that she had forgotten

>something.

>Perhaps it had something to do with the community center, where
Nabiki, Akane and Ranma were supposed to be. She hadn't been able to

>get the thought out of her mind all day long. She couldn't quite put
her finger on what the sensation meant, although she was sure

>something was wrong, somewhere nearby.

>Determined not to worry too much about it, she looked up - and was
surprised to find herself standing at the base of the steps leading

>up to the Convention Center's front doors. She stared at the large
sign above the glass doors for a while, reassuring herself that

>nothing was wrong.

>In the end, her premonitions won over. Oh, well, it wouldn't hurt to
take a quick look around. Even if there wasn't anything wrong she

>could always sign up for some swimming lessons...

> *****

>In the Testing Arena, Akane and Ranma found themselves completely
surrounded by a wide variety of strange monsters. But these weren't

>the ordinary garden-variety brand of monster... no, these were the
type that appeared in sentai shows. "Isn't this a bit much for

>people expected to sell pogs?"

>"Idiot!" Akane swung a monster into a convenient wall. "I think
they're trying to kill us! Did you make those BFC guys mad or

>something?"

>"Me? Why does everyone always point fingers at me?" Ranma ground
two monsters into a pasty - er, rubbery pulp. "Maybe Dad did

>something... The first I heard of this company was when Nabiki told
us about it."

>
"We'll worry about it later." Akane steamrolled another group of

>monsters. They couldn't keep this up forever... "We've gotta do
something!"

>
She and Ranma stood back-to-back now. Still more monsters appeared

>out of thin air to surround and attack them. The odds didn't seem to
be in their favor. "I guess we keep fighting," Ranma shrugged.

>

>
The youma had cornered Nabiki. Like Akane, Nabiki did have a fair
amount of martial-arts experience under her belt. But Akane was the one
with all the practical experience though. And nothing Daddy had taught
her covered fighting a youma at close quarters.

>What was a youma doing here, anyway? The whole mess sounded
to
Nabiki like it was lifted from the plot of a television show...

>After having lived through the craziness that always seemed to find
its way to Ranma, this turn of events didn't surprise Nabiki one bit.

>Now, if she had only come prepared for a youma...

>Nabiki took advantage of the youma's attacks to throw herself beyond
a nearby corner. "Where are you, little girl? Come on out, I'm
>waiting..." the youma laughed. She stepped into the hallway
Nabiki
was trying to hide in. "Ah, there you are! PRESS RELEASE

>*ATTACK*!!!!" Several steel-hard press releases shot through the air
to imbed themselves into the wall behind Nabiki, outlining her body.

>Please, don't let me die from such a corny attack, thought Nabiki.

A youma with a corny attack? What, had she slipped into an episode
>of _Sailor Moon_? Maybe a ridiculous-looking magical girl would even
come along at the last possible instant to save her...

>
A doorway down the hall opened. The youma turned in time to see

>Kasumi step out into the corridor. "Oh, my goodness..."

>"*Run*, Kasumi!" Nabiki yelled. But the youma was already leaping
to strike the newcomer down in a blinding flash of light.

>Before she connected, the youma saw the brooch Kasumi wore and
stopped cold. "It can't be possible!"
>
Nabiki drew herself up. If she was fast enough she could get Kasumi

>out of here while that thing was stunned. Where was Akane and Ranma?
Instead, a strange glow enveloped her sister, originating from

>Kasumi's brooch. Kasumi's outfit dissolved away as the energy swirled
about her, forming an entirely new and unexpected outfit for her. A

>lemon yellow skirt formed around her waist, and a lime-green top
appeared above it. A bright yellow bow, boots of the same color and

>white gloves finished off the ensemble while Kasumi's brooch settled
into place in the center of the bow. Oh, great, Nabiki blinked.

>First a youma, now a magical girl. Yet, this particular magical
girl just happened to be her older sister...

>
"Our community center is a place for relaxation and recreation, not

>evil! And I won't have you ruin the good name of show business! In
the name of love, I will make sure you suffer for what you have done;

>I'm the magical girl, Natsumi!!"

>Nabiki blinked again. Had Kasumi actually said THAT!? She

even
spoke perfectly like one of those 'magical girl' characters.

>Natsumi wondered where in the world her speech had come from. How had
she known what was going on here?

>
"The magical girl, Natsumi?" the youma mockingly echoed in a hollow

>voice. "I don't care WHO you are - I'll just destroy you!"

She
rammed Natsumi into a wall like an angry bull. Natsumi, stunned,

>rose only to be hit into the opposite wall by a drop-kick. "You're a
magical girl? Well, I'm not impressed." The youma drew both her

>arms back. "PRESS RELEASE ATTACK!!"

>Nabiki wanted to scream but she couldn't. She had to save Kasumi
from the deadly press releases. Nabiki didn't want to see her sister

>die... didn't want to lose another person she cared for! She ran
like she had never run before, and managed to push Kasumi out of the

>path of the press releases in time.

>Nabiki took the full force of the attack and was thrown into the
wall, hard.

>
"*Nabiki*!!!" Natsumi yelled as Nabiki hit the wall and slumped to

>the floor. She ran to Nabiki's side and saw that her sister was
unconscious. "How dare you... you'll pay for this!"

>
"Oh, I'm really SO scared. What in the world could you possibly do

>to me?"

>"This!" Bright green energy flared around Natsumi as she prepared to
attack. Her brooch flared with power - the power of Natsumi's anger.

>Natsumi wanted to make this youma suffer for hurting her sister.

"Love Power Strike... *NOW*!"

>
Natsumi's Strike completely engulfed the youma. It was only a matter

>of time before she phased out of existence. Natsumi, exhausted, sat
down next to Nabiki and buried her head between her knees, crying,

>hoping that Nabiki would recover.

> *****

>Akane and Ranma, too, were exhausted. For all their strength and
skill they had never had to face off against an endless horde of

>monsters. But somehow, that horde finally began to dwindle.

Soon
there was nothing left in the room but two martial artists and the

>smell of burning rubber.

>A security camera relayed the picture to an observer, far away.

The
observer was none too happy. "Mine! What is the reason for this

>failure?"

>"I'm sorry, my Lady," Mine appeared, bowing. "The youma we sent to
handle the plan was defeated by a magical girl who called herself,

>'Natsumi.'"

>"We must have those two martial artists under our control, magical
girl or not. They will make excellent new 'recruits' for our youma

>army. With the quality of martial artists in this area alone
 we
can take over this world, which will make our chairman
 extremely
 >happy. Mine, it's your job to bring me those martial artists.

Remember, I will not tolerate failure."
 >
Mine paused. "Yes, my Lady." She respectfully bowed once more

 >before her leader. She knew the price of failure... She
 would
capture Ranma and Akane, and get Nabiki as well... she
 respected
 >Nabiki; Nabiki was as dangerously cunning as many of the youma
 she
knew. Shrewd enough to bleed money out of a major corporation.
 And
 >besides, Nabiki would be the perfect bait to use for luring Ranma
 and
Akane into her trap...
 >

 >
"Are you sure you're all right?" Kasumi asked as she walked
 Nabiki
 >toward Tofu-sensei's clinic. The concern was quite evident in
 her
voice.
 >
"I'm fine," Nabiki said. Hopefully no one would see her in this

 >moment of weakness... Kasumi, thankfully, was back in her
 normal
clothes now. Natsumi's outfit would take a while to adjust
 to.
 >
"I just have one question."
 >
"Yes?"
 >
"Would you mind letting me have the exclusive marketing rights
 to
 >Natsumi?"

 >Kasumi's pace slowed. That's right, she was Natsumi! A
 magical
girl! Just as Mother had promised... If Nabiki was trying
 to
 >negotiate for marketing rights, she must be feeling better already.

It was a pity Kasumi couldn't feel the same way. She wondered -
 what
 >if there were more youma attacks? Was it entirely up to her
 to
defend the power of good and the lives of people everywhere?
 She had
 >never thought of herself as the 'action hero'-type and wondered
 if
 [Bbeing Natsumi wasn't going to be too much for her to
 handle...
 >She looked down upon her brooch and heard her mother's voice.

 >"Kasumi-chan... Remember, you can be anything you want if you
 put
your mind to it. You can do anything you want..."
 >
I'll try my best, Mother... I'll protect everyone, you'll see!

 >
The end, but only for now...
 >

 > <p><p>

2. Epsiode 2 - Too many Cooks

Ukyou sighed. Business was slow at her little restaurant today,

 >but she kept herself busy. An important business conference
 was
scheduled to take place over the weekend, and her restaurant
 was but a

>block away from the site where the conference was supposed to be held.
If everything went right, she could very well make quite a bit of profit

>out of all of this.

> And Nabiki thought she was the only one who knew how to make a
good profit. Ha!

>
 Still, she had to give credit to the famous - or infamous,

>depending who you talked to - major business corporation known as the
'BFC.' They were the ones heading up the conference. If not for

>them, it would probably be another weekend of hoping for someone to
leave a large enough tip to help pay off some of the bills.

Running a

>restaurant wasn't cheap, and nearly all of the money Ukyou made went
straight to operating expenses.

>
 Even with customers like Ranma and now execs from the BFC, like

>that strange character, Mine, she wasn't making as much money as she
liked. In fact, it was *because* of Ranma and some of the others,

>like Kunou and that hentai Tsubasa, that her restaurant often needed
to spend more money on repairs...

>
 Still, she was now making more money, thanks to the people at the

>BFC. She wondered if she should raise prices slightly to compensate.
The thought made her laugh: Ranma probably wouldn't like having to

>spend more money.

> A voice interrupted her thoughts. "Kuonji-san! Mail!!"

> "Hai!!" Ukyou quickly paged through the envelopes, and found,
much to her disappointment, that her mail was, as always, mostly

>bills. However, the very last envelope caught her eye. It was an
unassuming invitation addressed to her, inviting her to attend a

>martial-arts cooking competition this weekend. "All right!" she said
without thinking. "I can show Ran-chan that I'm the best fiancée for

>him!"

> But wait, wasn't there something else about this weekend she had
been thinking about not five minutes ago?

>
 The business conference. Oh, no... both the conference and the

>contest were going to be held at the same time! While her strong
sense of pride and honor was trying to convince her she needed to be

>present at the contest, she couldn't afford to leave the restaurant to
attend. She sighed, loud enough for the customers at the counter to

>hear.

> "Why can't things ever work out for me?"

> Across the street, in a vacant shop, Mine continued her stakeout.
She'd needed a way to get closer to her intended target, and a few

>weeks of keeping a close eye on Ukyou's restaurant convinced her she
had at last found a way to complete phase one of her plan.

>
 Soon she would be on her way to achieving supreme power, for her

>and the BFC.

>[OP: "The Girl is Magic" (Natsumi Title Theme)Inoue Kikuko]

>
(OP sequence: An unconcerned Kasumi stands in the main walkway of the

>Tendo yard, sweeping. Soon, Ranma and Akane appear, fighting.

Then
Ryouga, Shampoo and Ukyou join the fray. Genma appears, but Ranma

>throws him into the pond. Soun sits off to one side, crying.

Akane
slam-dunks Ranma into the pond, and the panda raises a sign that says,

>"What kept you?" Ranma takes a swipe at him with the

sign.
Finally, Nabiki and Mine appear in the background, seemingly trying to

>come to a business decision by various means,

including
rock-paper-scissors, as a large BFC building rises out of clouds of

>dust behind them all.

>Still unconcerned, Kasumi changes into Natsumi and uses her powers to
sweep the whole mess away at an incredible rate, leaving a white

>screen for the title logo to fade into.)

> Richard Beaubien

> Presents

> Natsumi, the Magical Girl

> (wildly embellished by Mike Koos, again)

> Episode 2: Too Many Cooks

> It was another average day at the Tendo Dojo, which usually meant
a couple of things. One, that Ranma and Akane were scheduled to be in

>the middle of their customary afternoon argument. Nabiki was sticking
to her schedule of economic domination. But, unlike one would

>normally expect, Kasumi was elsewhere visiting her mother's shrine,
alone.

>
 "Mother," she said in a near-whisper, looking as though she were

>about to cry. "Please help me... I don't know what to do. I want to
be Natsumi, but I can't....."

>
 Nabiki, who had entered the hallway on her way to the kitchen,

>noticed her sister was indeed crying and started toward her.

> "Is something wrong, Kasumi?"

> "No..." Kasumi replied half-heartedly, wiping away her tears.
"I'm just paying my respects."

>
 Nabiki didn't believe this, being one of the people who knew that

>Kasumi had a new secret to trouble her. "It's about the Natsumi
business, isn't it?"

>
 Kasumi looked at her younger sister for a second, then nodded.

>"Yes... I don't know if I can do this, Nabiki. I'm not the superhero
type." She paused. "I can't do this! I'm sorry, mother!!" She

>broke down and put her arms around Nabiki.

> Not one for physically emotional displays, Nabiki didn't

return
the gesture. "It's okay, Kasumi. You can do it. I've always had

>faith in you. And I'm sure Mom would, too, if she were here."

> "Nabiki-chan..."

> "Mom must have believed you could do this, or else she
wouldn't
have placed such power in your hands," Nabiki said
quietly, holding
>back tears of her own. She had assumed she'd come to terms with
her
mother's death, yet there was always something that said all
she had
>done was lock her feelings away... like that package from Mom.
That
junior business set had been an eye-opener.
>
 She still had feelings; she wasn't just an opportunist. She was

>still Human. She had a weakness and could be hurt, just as she
was
when her mother died.
>
 Nabiki noted Kasumi's expectant gaze. "Nabiki-chan?"
>
 "Ah... excuse me, I've got some work to do, Kasumi," she
blurted,
>moving away from her older sister. She couldn't let Kasumi see
her
cry. She couldn't let people know she had a weakness.
>
 Fortunately, Akane came in time to provide a diversion.

>"Kasumi-oneechan! Guess what!" the youngest of the three
Tendo
daughters exclaimed excitedly. "I've been invited to attend
a
>martial-arts cooking contest this weekend." A note of
determination
appeared in Akane's eyes. "I'll finally show
everyone what a great
>cook I am, just like Mom said I could be..."

> The words 'Akane' and 'cook' together in the same
sentence
usually made everyone except Kasumi and perhaps Ryouga
cringe. Nabiki
>shrugged it off, figuring that if a contest was involved she
wouldn't
have to eat the end result anyway, and continued walking.

>
 "That's great news, Akane!" Kasumi exclaimed, all signs of her

>earlier sadness suddenly gone without a trace.

> "Yeah, and I bet you'll win, too, Akane..." Ranma
managed,
appearing out of nowhere. It was obvious that the words
weren't
>coming easily to him. Compliments and encouragement were not
his
usual style.
>
 "Really, Ranma?" Akane looked at Ranma in a different light. It

>was almost as if everything was all right with their
relationship.

> Of course, it wouldn't last long before... "Yeah, your cooking
is
already classified as a lethal weapon so--" Akane finished
Ranma's
>sentence for him - with a large wooden mallet at high
velocity.
"Ranma no... *baka*!"
>
 Why did Ranma do things like that? Every time the moment seemed

>to be turning tender, why did he always have to slip in some stupid
or
childish insult like that? Akane didn't know anymore, but had
come to
>fully expect it from Ranma.

> In the adjoining hall, Nabiki sighed. At least some
things
remained the way they always were. She could almost set her
watch by
>it all.

> Which meant that their usual unwarranted visitor should
be
popping in right about...
>
 "Nihao, Ranma!!"
>
 Today's guest, Shampoo. "Oh, man, not Shampoo..."
>
 "What are you doing here, Shampoo?" Akane asked, the usual hint

>of venom to her voice.

> "None of your business, violent girl. Shampoo here to tell
Ranma
that she will win cooking contest for him."
>
 Cooking contest? Oh, no... "The martial-arts cooking contest?"

>
 "Why, yes! Once Shampoo win it Ranma sure to marry her!!"

>Shampoo yelled, emphasizing her words with the aid of a
microphone
that she pulled from nowhere.
>
 "Oh, no you won't. *I'm* going to win the contest," Akane
stated.
>
 "Ha! Violent girl lucky if judges even survive food..."
>
 "How dare you! I'll show YOU a thing or two about cooking..."

>
 From the looks on both Akane and Shampoo's faces, Ranma guessed

>they were about to renew their rivalry. He sighed; wondering if
he
should take the invitation to compete in the contest, if only
to
>prevent Akane and Shampoo from wrecking things. The invitation
hadn't
actually been to *him*, but Ranko. That had given Ranma a
moment's
>pause. It wasn't like Ranko had applied for a job or put her name
on
anything official, so how had they known about her? How had
they even
>known where to find her?

> He'd considered ignoring the invitation, but a
martial-arts
contest was a martial-arts contest, and his pride
wouldn't let him
>turn down a competition with the words 'martial-arts' in the
title.
Even if the contest turned out to be insanely stupid.

>
 Kasumi's innate ability to avoid this sort of impending

>confrontation lead her to the kitchen. She figured it wouldn't
hurt
to make some sandwiches, since the combatants were likely
going to be
>at it for a while.

> She had begun slicing a second round of pieces of bread
when
Nabiki entered the kitchen. "There are some sandwiches on the
counter
>if you want any, Nabiki."

> "No thanks, big sister. I came in here to ask you a question."

> "What is it?" Kasumi tried to read Nabiki's expression
but
couldn't.
>
 "Would you be interested in entering the martial-arts cooking

>contest as Natsumi?"

> "Why?" Kasumi didn't know what to make of the question.

> "Oh, for two reasons: One, it might be a good opportunity
to
train for any more fights, just in case." Nabiki settled for a

>dramatic pause. "And it couldn't hurt to give Natsumi a little

more
exposure. It's an excellent marketing opportunity."
>
 A huge bead of sweat appeared on Kasumi's forehead. What, was

>money the only thing that Nabiki thought about? Still, Nabiki
had
been right about one thing - she definitely could use the
training.

>Although, she continued refusing to think of herself as a
fighter...
"All right, I'll do it."

>
 "Thanks, sis! You won't regret it! I'll take care of the

>details!" Nabiki raced out of the kitchen. If things worked out,
she
could make a killing in marketing and Kasumi might pick up the
self

>confidence every magical girl-slash-fighter for justice
needed.
Nabiki smiled. She'd found herself another couldn't-lose
plan to make

>herself some money.

> Kasumi remained unmoving in the kitchen, wondering if she was
up
to the challenge. A voice seemed to come to her from the
direction of

>her mother's shrine. "You can do it, Kasumi. I know you can."

> She sighed. "Mother, I hope you're right."

> ****

> Lunch at the BFC was generally like lunch at every other
major
corporation in the world. People would gather in the
corporate

>lunchroom and discuss business, or perhaps the fate of their
favorite
sports teams.

>
 The BFC superiors, on the other hand, had their own agendas;

>sure, they would do the same thing, more or less, discuss
business...
but the business of a much more sinister enterprise.
Such a

>high-level meeting was taking place this particular
afternoon,
involving Mine, a younger youma servant, and their
immediate superior.

>
 "My Lady, I would like to know why she's been given the
authority

>to go ahead with this ludicrous 'martial-arts cooking contest?'"
Mine
asked, making sure to hurl an acid glance her co-worker's
way.

>
 "She has provided a rather interesting plan to recruit some

>martial artists for our cause without attracting suspicion to the
BFC
like the first plan did."

>
 "Using one of our dummy corporations, Sabre 2000," the youngest

>attendee spoke up, "we will lure the best of this area's
martial
artists into a trap they can't possibly escape from. My
little

>cooking contest. Ha!!"

> Mine raised an eyebrow. "'Sabre 2000?'" she echoed. "Sounds
like
a steak knife set, not a corporation. And your plan sounds like

>the typical 'bad guy setup' for a trap. Do you *really* expect it
to
work?"

>
 The youth was about to respond to Mine's question when their

>superior cut her off. "Enough in-fighting. We're on the same

side
here, after all. Mine, my decision stands. She will go ahead with
>this trap." Their superior straightened. "I will not tolerate
any
more squabbling over my decisions, either. My decisions are
made with
>the best interests of this company in mind and the 'Master Vision'
BFC
has for the future. Do you understand?"
>
 "Yes, my Lady."
>
 "Good. I hope we do not have this problem in the future. As for

>the other plan, I see no reason why it should not proceed. If it
is
successful, the BFC will control the best natural resources in
the
>world. If it fails, then the failure will be accounted for, with
the
usual penalties for wasting company resources."
>
 The younger youma froze upon hearing the words. She knew the

>price of failure, and didn't intend to pay such a severe price.
"I
won't fail you, my Lady." She disappeared from the office.

>
 "Well, Mine, any other questions?"
>
 "No, my Lady, I'll be leaving now." Mine bowed, leaving the

>office by foot. She kept a slight smile to herself. What
her
impetuous co-worker didn't know was that Mine had known about
her plan
>from the very beginning, and had wanted her to proceed with it.
It
would, after all, lead to total failure, and the elimination of

>another potential adversary.

> The one person Mine needed to complete Phase 1 of her plan
would
be left out of the snafu because of the business conference
she had
>scheduled for the weekend. With the conference, Ukyou Kuonji would
be
hers for the taking.
>

>
 It was the day of the cooking contest, and it seemed like

>everyone in the entire district was present to enjoy the
spectacle.
"Okay, everyone! Sabre 2000 is proud to present the
best of the best,
>the greatest of the greatest! All together in one location for
the
martial-arts cooking contest! Be sure to get your tickets now;
you
>won't want to miss this one! We'll be starting in about two
hours!"

> And everyone did rush to get their very own ticket, each
person
not suspecting the setup to be an average evil-demon-type
trap. But
>the announcer really didn't care; if this plan worked the BFC
would
have a vast amount of new... 'recruits.'
>
 None of the martial artists recognized the trap, either, but
most
>of them had preoccupied themselves with different concerns.

> Akane was busy recalling different ways to prepare cup ramen,
and
thinking of ways to trounce Shampoo.
>
 Shampoo was running through plans to take Akane out of the

>running - none of which involved Akane's safety and well-being -
and
ways to win Ranma's heart.

>
 Ranko was wondering how in the world she was going to keep the
>property damage to a minimum.

> And the others had come without suspicion. Who in their
right
minds would plan a cooking contest with evil in mind?

>
 Everyone was so distracted that they had overlooked any signs
>that would point to a trap, and normally that would mean it was
smooth
sailing for the youma's plan. However, it wasn't going to
be that
>easy.

> "What do you MEAN Ukyou Kuonji hasn't shown up, yet!?" The
youma
yelled at her underling. She liked the feeling of being in
charge,
>though she wisely kept that to herself. Now wasn't the time to
be
drunk with power, anyway.
>
 If Ukyou didn't show up, the small circle of four of the most
>powerful martial artists this town had to offer would not be
complete,
and there was no way the youma wanted to present her
superior with an
>incomplete package. The end result? Failure, with the
'usual
penalties.' "I need another martial artist *right now*!
Find me one,
>or be prepared to face the consequences!"

> Nabiki allowed herself the luxury of a slight grin,
having
overheard the entire conversation. Ukyou, not attend a
martial-arts
>cooking contest? Hmm, maybe Nabiki's influence was rubbing off
on
her. Nabiki liked the idea: a little competition was good for
>business. Oh, well, Ukyou's loss, Natsumi's gain... "Excuse me,"
she
cleared her throat. "I may be able to help you find another
martial
>artist."

> The youma looked relieved. "You can?"

> "Hey, you can trust me," Nabiki replied, in a voice that
did
everything *but* encourage a sense of trust.
>
 "Just hurry! I need him or her up there, now!"
>
 "Okay!" Nabiki yelled, rounding the corner and heading for the
>ladies' room. Kasumi was there, waiting for Nabiki's signal.
"We're
in," Nabiki told her older sister. "How are you going to
change into
>Natsumi?"

> Kasumi seemed confident. "Like this--" I hope I have this
right!

>
 "Love Power..... *TRANSFORM*!!!"
>
 A strange yet familiar warm glow enveloped Kasumi. Her outfit
>seemed to dissolve away as brighter strands of living
energy
circulated around her body. A lemon yellow skirt coalesced
around her
>waist, and a lime-green top appeared above it. A bright yellow
bow,
boots of the same unassuming color and elegant white gloves
finished
>off the ensemble while the brooch settled into its place,
nestled
within the center of the bow.
>
 "How do I look, Nabiki?"

>
 Nabiki kept her mouth shut. "Fine. That should do. I just have
>one more question, though..."

> "Yes?"

> "Would you mind terribly if I filmed your transformation
scene
for the etchi market?"
>
 A large bead of sweat appeared on Natsumi's forehead.
"Nabiki!!"
>
 "Just kidding, sis. We'll stay with the kids' market; it's more

>lucrative anyway," Nabiki smirked, leading Natsumi out of
the
restroom. Natsumi studied her sister with an untrained eye.
Although
>Nabiki usually came up with some extreme plans to make her money,
when
it was necessary Nabiki would always pull through for her
family. It
>was Nabiki's handiwork that kept the dojo expense account in
the
black, even considering all the dojo repairs that had to be
made on an
>almost-daily basis, ever since Ranma and Genma had come to live
with
the Tendo family.
>
 Right about now, Nabiki wore that look of grim determination
that
>said no one had better cross her or her family, unless they wanted
to
face the consequences.
>
 She'd directed this gaze at the youma running the entire show,

>but her target didn't catch it. Instead, the youma was busy sizing
up
the fighter Nabiki had brought, and began to curse Fate for
bringing
>her a magical girl, of all people. "I guess you're in," the
youma
muttered in a tone of defeat. She wondered if it was too
late to
>start a less stressful job, perhaps something along the line
of
hostage negotiating...
>
 "Was there ever any doubt?" Nabiki gave Natsumi a quick hug,

>whispering, "Do your best!" Natsumi smiled, proceeding to the
main
arena where the contest was to be held. She still had doubts
as to
>whether she would succeed or fail. But with Nabiki and her
mother
watching over her, Natsumi felt like she could do just
about anything.
>
 The youma - on the other hand - thought she couldn't do
anything
>right. Her brilliant plan would be ruined by the appearance of
this
magical girl, whoever she was. Still, there was one way she
could
>save face in front of her boss... eliminate this pest of a
magical
girl, or better yet, bring her and the martial artists for
her
>superiors to do with as they pleased. Yes, that would prove once
and
for all her status as the best corporate youma in the BFC, and
that
>she deserved to be promoted.

> A nervous smile formed on her face. Today would either be
her
greatest victory, or her greatest defeat.
>

>
 The arena was packed to the rafters with spectators anxiously

>awaiting the start of the contest. There were two main reasons for
this. For starters, everyone loved a good fight, and there had been
>no shortage of that lately.

> Plus, the crowd would double as the judges for the event, meaning
free food for everyone... Maybe that was the reason the majority of
>the crowd looked like college students, Nabiki thought. But
irregardless of the age groups, the crowd was excited, and no one was
>going to take that away from them. It took a high-pitched squeal from
the PA system to silence the crowd.
>
 For the moment, anyway.
>
 "Ladies and gentlemen, it gives me great pleasure to welcome you
>to the first annual Sabre 2000 martial-arts cooking contest! Where
it's not just size, speed and skill that counts, but taste, too!"
>
 Someone in the crowd groaned at the attempt at humor.
>
 "And now, for our four competitors. Hailing from the Tendo Dojo,
>Akane Tendo!!"

> Akane entered the ring to a round of applause, though some of the
audience more familiar with her cuisine turned blue at the thought of
>actually having to eat such things.

> "Next, from China, please welcome our next competitor, Shampoo!"

> Another round of defined applause greeted Shampoo. Hmm... with
Shampoo in the running, the thought of having to eat Akane's cooking
>wasn't as intimidating. In fact, more people knew about the
Nekohanten and Shampoo's own brand of cooking, especially since
>Shampoo's great-grandmother had made a name for her restaurant.

> The oddsmakers were also interested. For whenever Shampoo and
Akane were in the same ring, it was bound to be an interesting fight.
>
 "Our third competitor, also representing the Tendo Dojo... Ranko
>Tendo!"

> Everyone applauded for Ranma, including Shampoo, whom Akane tried
to stop with a glare of ice. Not everyone knew who Ranko was, but
>those who knew Ranma's secret and Ranma in general knew that he or she
wasn't going to disappoint anyone in the fighting department.

>
 With Ranma, Akane and Shampoo present, there was going to be a

>great fight, indeed.

> "Our final competitor hails from parts unknown. She's a mystery,
all right... Let's give a warm welcome for, Natsumi!"

>
 By now the arena was in an uproar - not for Natsumi, but

>anticipation over the impending showdown between the three known
martial artists. Which of the three would survive?
>
 Only four people truly paid any attention at all to Natsumi, one

>of which was Nabiki. The other three... were her opponents.

> "All right, everyone take your places, and let's begin!"
the
announcer exclaimed, as the youma took her place in the crowd.

>
 The four fighters rushed to their would-be kitchens to plan
their
>individual strategies.

> Akane glanced at the mysterious newcomer and decided not to
face
off against her unless it was absolutely necessary. She
couldn't
>quite place her finger on why, but this Natsumi reminded her
somehow
of Kasumi.
>
 She also decided to steer clear of worrying about Shampoo for
the
>moment and focus on Ranma as her first target. After all, Ranma was
a
decent cook herself when she had to be, and Akane didn't want to
think
>about having to live through the humiliation of Ranma beating her in
a
cooking contest.
> Again.

> Ranma decided against attacking Natsumi, though not for the
same
reasons as Akane. She wanted to wait and see what kind of
skill this
>new opponent had before they had to fight, something Ranma
usually
didn't do until much later in the game.
>
 She also decided to keep her distance from Shampoo, who would

>only get emotional and cause an avalanche of problems. At least
this
Natsumi wasn't going to pound him for any of that... was she?

>
 So, she settled for the only option left: Akane.
>
 Shampoo's strategy was even more simple. She had to eliminate

>two people - Akane, and this Natsumi person. And Shampoo would
take
care of the newcomer first, so she could spend the remainder
of her
>time humiliating Akane as much as possible.

> Natsumi, for her part, wasn't planning an attack. Rather,
she
was the only person out of the four who had actually been
cooking
>something. She had already set aside a completed pot of miso
soup
when she heard something moving nearby. Natsumi instinctively
managed
>to duck an incoming bonbiri and move into a defensive stance as
she
prepared for another attack. Before her stood Shampoo, equally

>prepared and ready to strike.

> "You give up, so Shampoo no have to hurt."

> "I'm sorry, but I can't give up!"

> "Then I attack!!!" Shampoo suddenly sprinted towards
Natsumi
with her remaining bonbiri in one hand. Natsumi merely
stood there as
>Shampoo ran in to attack. But Natsumi was able to move out of the
way
as Shampoo arrived, grabbing Shampoo's wrist and levering her
onto her
>back.

> Shampoo recovered immediately and readied herself for
a
counterattack. Natsumi once again lapsed into a defensive
stance, but
>now her thoughts were beginning to seep into her concentration.

She
wondered how she had been able to do such a move, since she hadn't

>studied martial arts except for a brief period during her childhood.
Her mother had insisted she be trained in other things instead, and

>Soun Tendo, sure that he would later have a son to carry on the family
name, agreed.

>
 Shampoo interrupted Natsumi's flashback with a spinning side kick

>that Natsumi was able to duck.

> The crowd was enjoying the fight between Natsumi and Shampoo.
They hadn't expected the newcomer to be such a good martial artist,

>yet she was putting up a great show against Shampoo. Nabiki was
yelling at the top of her lungs, hoping Natsumi would show Shampoo who

>was the better fighter. There was also concern in Nabiki's voice.
Where had Kasumi picked up this level of martial-arts skill? Not from

>the brooch, if anything. No, this skill could only come from years of
training, training Kasumi never had.

>
 The youma was also enjoying the fight, though for different

>reasons than the crowd. She enjoyed seeing the magical girl squirm,
trying to fend off Shampoo's attacks. Unfortunately, Natsumi seemed

>to be doing a decent job of defending herself.

> The youma still had her advantage. With Natsumi distracted by
Shampoo, she could initiate her attack now and take all four warriors

>by surprise.

> And Natsumi would go down in bitter defeat.

> ****

> Yelling a battle cry at the top of her lungs, Shampoo launched
herself toward Natsumi with a drop-kick. But before she could

>connect, her path was blocked by a wall literally made up of millions
of large chow-mein noodles. The noodles quickly encircled the ring,

>cutting the four warriors apart from the outside world.

> "I hope you're ready for the final showdown! 'Cause if you
are, you aren't gonna be disappointed!" the youma yelled,

>transforming her appearance. She leapt into the supposedly edible
ring, landing in front of Natsumi and laughing the typical evil-youma

>laugh as she did so. "Well, I see you're all tied up at the moment.
But don't worry; you'll be dead soon, and the others... let's just say

>they're going to have a little career change in their immediate
future!" the youma gloated, now looking like one of the large rubber

>monsters from those shows Natsumi had never really watched to begin
with. "Now, prepare yourself for my final attack! Take-out Food

>NIGHTMARE!!!"

> At that point an undeterminable amount of take-out dishes began
to materialize about the youma. Those high enough in the stands to

>still see what was going on in the ring above the wall of chow-mein -
and whom hadn't fled in terror and panic - might have enjoyed

the
>thought of having one of those apparently tasty dishes, but
Nabiki,
still at ringside, ignored them. She was more concerned
over Kasumi
>and what those dangerous dishes might do to her.

> A sphere of green energy formed around Natsumi. In a matter
of
moments the noodles that had bound her had vanished. To the
youma's
>shock, Natsumi began powering up for an attack. "Cooking should
be
something done for pleasure, not used as a tool in an act of
terror."
>
 Yeah, try telling that to Akane, Nabiki thought.
>
 "I won't have you using the art of cooking to further your acts

>of evil! In the name of love and honor, I'm Natsumi, the
magical
girl!" More bright green energy came to life, swirling
about Natsumi.
>The youma sighed. She had decided to pass on trying to escape -
this
'death' would be far less painful to bear than the one she
would
>experience at the hands of her BFC superiors. ".....Love
Power
Strike, NOW!!"
>
 The Strike caught up with the youma, encasing her in a sphere
of
>that same green energy. The youma screamed, and turned into a
fine
powder that blew away on the wind.
>
 Natsumi collapsed onto the arena's mat, exhausted. How could
she
>help save the world if she kept falling into these stereotypical
youma
traps? She was supposed to save people from them, not fall
victim to
>them herself, wasn't she?

> The sight of Shampoo running toward her interrupted
this
particular train of thought. Natsumi warily prepared herself
for an
>attack, weak as she was, though what Shampoo did instead
surprised
her.
>
 Shampoo bowed. "You are capable fighter, Natsumi-san. We no

>fight each other." But then a cat-like smile appeared on
Shampoo's
face. "For now." That said, Shampoo left to see if she
could tend to
>Ranma.

> Natsumi let out a huge sigh of relief. She really hadn't
felt
like fighting anyone right about now. Or anything else, for
that
>matter.

> Yet those remaining from the crowd had different ideas.
They
cheered and clapped - some even catcalled - and asked for an
encore.
>Some even shouted, wanting to know if they could go out on a date
with
her.
>
 Natsumi gave another sigh, leaving the building. She wasn't
sure
>if she was ready to be a hero, but she was definitely sure of
one
thing: she didn't want to be an idol.
>
 Nabiki, in contrast, was delighted. Natsumi would be a
marketing
>tool to help her achieve financial success. She had visions of
mutual
funds dancing in her mind when she suddenly recalled a news

article
 >she had read a few months ago. She recalled that all of
 the
controlling shares in the Sabre 2000 company had been
 aggressively
 >bought up by another corporation.

 > BFC. The corporation that had a hand in the first youma attack.

 > It was one hell of a coincidence, and coincidence was one
 thing
Nabiki refused to believe in.
 >

 >
 Ukyou sighed. The business conference that was supposed to have

 >made her quite a tidy little profit, had in fact brought in
 little
more than a lousy five yen. It almost seemed as though
 there weren't
 >even a conference in town as nobody had come to the restaurant at
 all;
most likely everyone had gone to the cooking competition,
 Ukyou
 >thought sourly to herself.

 > One person *had* come in, but Ukyou knew she would have
 had
better luck had she attended the contest. She might have been
 able to
 >win the love of her true fiancée, Ranma Saotome.

 > "What's wrong, Kuonji-san?" Mine asked, feigning concern.

 > "I thought today was going to be a great business day, so
 I
stayed here instead of doing something else I should've done."

 >
 "The martial-arts cooking competition?" Mine spoke into her

 >thoughts.

 > Ukyou was surprised. "Yeah. How'd you know?"

 > Mine smiled. "Call it a hunch."

 > "Anyway," Ukyou gestured to the empty restaurant, "this is
 what
it got me."
 >
 Mine appeared thoughtful for a moment. "Well, I'm sorry to hear

 >that. Perhaps I can do something to make the day a better
 business
day for you." The windup, and the pitch. "How would you
 like to join
 >the BFC in a joint venture to produce a restaurant chain?"

 > Mine saw she had Ukyou's attention. "Think of it... your
 name
could be on everyone's minds from everyone in Japan! And the
 same for
 >your food! Maybe one day, you can even have restaurants around
 the
world!"
 >
 Ukyou smiled. Mine was perhaps being a little overzealous, but

 >she *was* offering Ukyou a great shot at financial success.
 "Sure,
why not? I'd love to!"
 >
 "Great! Come back with me to my office, then, and we'll work
 out
 >the paperwork!" Mine tried to hold back her laughter. Phase one
 of
her plan would soon be complete, as soon as Ukyou Kuonji was
 turned
 >into a youma slave...

 >To be continued...

>Subject: Natsumi3: embellishment

> The Shetai Productions Television Studios were, for the most
part, operated like most other top-of-the-line television production studios around the world. They too had the committed staff, modern
equipment and all that was necessary to contribute to the high level of excellence demanded for the television productions of the day.

> But somehow, the rules changed when one encountered the infamous
SPTS Stage S.
>
 Yukie felt a slight twinge of nervousness - the same one she

>always felt on entering Stage S, and she had come to take it for
granted.

>
 "Good morning, minna!" she put on her cheerful act. "How's

>everything going today?"

> Her co-star passed her a look that asked, 'How can you be
cheerful at a time like this?' "Oh, swell, I suppose, if you forget

>the fact that today's the last day we're going to work on this stupid
show..."

>
 Yukie began to frown, which was a rarity when it came to her,

>since she was almost always quite cheerful. Number one among the
things she least wanted to think about today had to be the impending

>death of the television show they starred in - 'The Mystical Fighters
Sany.' Hitomi, however, always seemed to enjoy bringing everything

>crashing back to reality.

> "But, Hitomi-chan, our show can still be saved! I just know that
right now, all our loyal fans are stuffing the mailboxes with their

>pleas to save the show!"

> Hitomi tried hard to keep from breaking up into laughter on the
spot. "What," she snorted a laugh, "you mean the two people who're

>stupid enough to actually WATCH this show?"

> "Hate to say it, Yukie... but it's not like there's a big market
for a sentai magical-girl show," Aya added, while packing some of her

>belongings from her locker into a box. "Besides, most of our ideas
were swiped from shows like Sailor Moon..."

>
 "And RayEarth, we took quite a bit from that show, too. Not to

>mention a whole lot of others."

> Yukie was becoming distraught. "Yeah... I know... I just don't
wanna leave..." The next thing anyone knew, she was on her knees,

>crying up a storm. The main thing Yukie had enjoyed about working on
the show was her co-workers, and now that the end was near she

>wondered if she would ever see them again.

> Hitomi knelt down beside the sobbing girl to comfort her.

As
much as she hated to admit it, she would really miss Yukie, the rest

>of the 'team' and the whole rotten flea-bag of a show...

> From the control room, Mana and Mia watched their stars with
looks of concern. The show had originally been their idea, an attempt
>to cash in on the growing magical-girl craze, and it might very well
have worked.
>
 Unless, of course, one had to use leftover rubber costumes from
>old monster movies and didn't have a true plot to speak of. But that
was in the past now, and they all had to deal with the certain death
>of their show.

> Mia sighed. "Well, Mana, I guess this is it. It was nice
working with you."
>
 "Oh, I wouldn't say that..."
>
 "What!?" the two ladies turned in unison. Behind them stood a

>young woman in a business suit, with a smile on her face that on
closer inspection almost appeared painted-on.
>
 "I represent a company that wishes to buy the rights for your

>show. Together, we'll produce a marketing campaign and turn this show
into a major multimedia and marketing hit!"
>
 "Really!?"
>
 "Yes. The first thing we'll do is a live performance at the

>Tokyo Toy Show at the Egg Dome. That'll be an excellent way to kick
off the toy line, wouldn't you say?"
>
 Mia could barely think straight. She was in heaven; at last her
>dreams of having a hit television show had a chance of coming true.
And to think her film teacher had said you needed a good plot to make
>a television show... *ha*! She felt like proving one only needed an
insane amount of money and a good marketing blitz to get the ball
>rolling. "We accept! How soon can we start?"

>"Why, this weekend, of course. And when your stars arrive,
they'll have a chance to showcase their new transformation

>brooches..." Mia and Mana both looked on in awe as their new
benefactor brought forth what would be the first of hopefully many new
>props for the show many thought dead. For in her hands were four
neatly gold-trimmed brooches, each brooch featuring a polished black
>opal set dead-center.

>"Hey, wow, these are beautiful! Thanks! We'll start working on
a routine right away!" And with that, the two producers rushed to

>tell their young stars the good news. The show was saved.

> The woman who had saved the show was now alone once more,
standing in the control room and allowing herself the luxury of at
>least one evil laugh. By now all signs of sympathy, warmth or caring
- whether real or feigned - had drained completely away from her
>smile. All that was left was a sincere amount of evil and malice in
its place. "M'lady, the experiment has begun," she murmured to

>herself. "This... *toy show* shall be the proving ground for our

new
special technology that should give the BFC its rightful status as
>rulers of the world..."

> If there was a camera in the room, her image would have faded to
black.
>
[OP: "The Girl is Magic" (Natsumi Title Theme)/Inoue Kikuko]

>
(OP sequence: An unconcerned Kasumi stands in the main walkway of the
>Tendo yard, sweeping. Soon, Ranma and Akane appear, fighting. Then
Ryouga, Shampoo and Ukyou join the fray. Genma appears, but Ranma
>throws him into the pond. Soun sits off to one side, crying. Akane
slam-dunks Ranma into the pond, and the panda raises a sign that says,
>"What kept you?" Ranma takes a swipe at him with the sign.
Finally, Nabiki and Mine appear in the background, seemingly trying to
>come to a business decision by various means, including
rock-paper-scissors, as a large BFC building rises out of clouds of
>dust behind them all.
>Still unconcerned, Kasumi changes into Natsumi and uses her powers to
sweep the whole mess away at an incredible rate, leaving a white
>screen for the title logo to fade into.)
> Richard Beaubien
> Presents
> Natsumi, the Magical Girl
> (wildly embellished by Mike Koos, of Overimagination Anonymous (whoops))
> Episode 3: Toy Show Terror!
> "What? You want me to go where!?"
> "The Tokyo Toy Show," Nabiki repeated for her older sister's
benefit. "It'll be the perfect place to start marketing the Natsumi
>image. All we have to do is plant the seeds and..." She began
wringing her hands in anticipation. Natsumi was going to be her key
>to fame, fortune and utter control over the toy market, just for
starters - that would teach Bandai to mess with her...
>
Kasumi, on the other hand, wasn't as enthusiastic as money-minded
>Nabiki with this latest scheme. Unlike Nabiki or Akane, she had never
really gone on any major trips away from home, even when Mother was
>still alive. Soun enjoyed staying home, since he knew Kasumi felt
that her place was at home taking care of everything, including
>Father...
> She still didn't like the idea of being Natsumi, either, even if
Mother's spirit seemed to think Kasumi could handle being a magical
>girl. Kasumi couldn't bring herself to agree with her mother, no
matter how much she wanted to.
>
"But what about Father? He wouldn't like me being away from home
>like this..."
> Nabiki didn't even bat an eye. "Leave it to me. I'll take care
of everything."

>

>
 "What do you mean, you're taking Kasumi with you? How could you

>leave me here all alone without... without..." No longer able to
get
the words out, Soun broke down into tears.
>
 Nabiki had expected this. She glanced down at her watch and

>smirked. Dad had managed to go a whole minute without crying when
she
told him about her... *business trip*, which was remarkable,
but still
>no record. She wasn't sure whether to be proud of him - or
feel
sympathy. If, in fact, that was still possible.
>
 But, she had much more important things to think about now...

>
"Don't worry," she sighed. "I'll take good care of her and make

>sure nothing happens to her. It'll be good for her at any rate...
she
needs to take some time off to release some stress."
>
The only response she was met with was another wave of tears.

>This was a good sign, however; if Daddy had really wanted to
stop
Kasumi from going, he would have put up more of an argument.

>
"But who will take care of the cooking while Kasumi is away?"

>Genma Saotome entered the room. First and foremost, Nabiki knew,
the
man always placed himself and his stomach first. Then his
pride, and
>maybe somewhere after that his son...

>"Did someone ask who'll take care of the cooking?"
Akane
practically leaped down the stairs. Ranma merely took the
normal
>route. "I'll do it!!"

> Everyone's face but Akane's turned ashen at precisely the
same
instant. Akane, take over the cooking? They all knew what
that
>meant... but Ranma was the only one to risk saying something.
"Oh,
no..."
>
 Nabiki figured this was an opportune time to leave the room.

>After all, it looked like Akane was getting ready to beat the
stuffing
out of Ranma yet again. She'd had what she came for,
anyway, even
>though Daddy hadn't truly approved in words as much as water.

> Besides, if no one wanted to bother with Akane's cooking,
why
didn't they just bother to cook their own food? They were old
enough
>and mature enough to do *that*, weren't they?

> Akane had turned Ranma's head into the human equivalent of
an
inflatable bounce-back punching doll. Genma and Soun stood off
to one
>side, watching the carnage with their usual disinterest.

> When Akane finally gave up and walked away, Genma approached
what
was left of his son.
>
 "Ranma, my son, our fates rest in your hands."
>
 "Huh? What are you talking about now, old man?"
>
 "For our sake - and our dignity - you must go out and get us

>something to eat from Ukyou."

> Ranma frowned. "Hate to tell you this, Dad, but her place hasn't

been open for the past few days." He himself didn't know the reasons
>why... Ukyou would *never* allow her restaurant to be closed
for
extended periods of time without a very good reason. Something had to
>be up, or wrong...

> Maybe she was having some sort of financial problem. Oh, well,

>Ranma thought, he could always ask her what was going on the next time
>he saw her in class. Right now, he had his own problems to deal with.

>Like locating something edible, for example. Ranma could always cook
>for himself if it came to that, but his demented macho pride wouldn't

>allow him that luxury.
>
 "Oneechan! Oh..." Akane entered the room. She turned to Ranma.

>"Do you know where Kasumi-oneechan is?"

> Ranma was still brushing himself off from Akane's earlier

>retribution. "I think she's left already."
>
 "Oh," Akane said, disappointed. "Do you know where she keeps the
>vinegar?"

> "Vinegar?" Ranma flashed through all the recipes he could think

>of that needed vinegar. "Why d'you need that?"
>
 Akane's impatience showed through. "Because I need to use it

>while I'm boiling the rice."

> Ranma facefaulted. She was kidding, right?

> ****

> It had once been said that working at the BFC was a unique

>experience - particularly if one happened to be in middle management.
>Always waiting for the promotions that somehow always went to company

>outsiders... though many wouldn't think too much of such a procedure.
>
 Yet another outsider was being inducted today. The staff had

>prepared themselves to meet the newcomer who would soon join the

>company's vaunted upper echelon.
>
 Mine's expression was one of practiced economic dignity and

>composure. "Everyone, I'd like to introduce your new immediate

>supervisor - and my assistant. Let's give a warm BFC welcome to...
>Ukyou Kuonji!"

> She stepped aside to reveal Ukyou, dressed smartly in a crimson

>business suit. On one of the lapels rested a gold brooch, a pure-black
>opal as its main setting.

> Ukyou's gaze dared not waver as she studied the people she would

>be working with. Mine smiled; this was exactly how she had been taken
>in, so long ago.

> She had embraced the evil of the BFC, and now the same was Ukyou

>Kuonji's path to take.
>

>
 "What!? All right!" Yukie bubbled, her enthusiasm suddenly

>restored. "Our show really is saved, Mia? Yippee!!"

> "Yeah, and we're going to be using real props, costumes
and
effects for a change. No more of that old stuff. Maybe we can
>actually put together a decent show now!"

> "Or a REAL one..."

> Try as she might, Hitomi wasn't going to succeed in ruining
her
coworkers' moods.
>
 "Cheer up, Hitomi! We're going to make more episodes! Better

>ones! Yahoo!!"

> Hitomi merely turned her gaze to her overly enthusiastic
friends
and sighed. "Well, it ain't Hamlet... it isn't even 'Hello
Kitty,'
>but it's a job, I guess. You wanna keep doing it?"

> "Hey, it's a paycheck."

> "Okay! We're in..."

> "Yippee!"

> Mia smiled. If there was ever brilliance in casting, it
showed
in the people she'd cast for this show. She had somehow
managed to
>match the characters' personalities quite perfectly - Yukie, the
ever
cheerful, cute girl. Hitomi, the tough, hard-nosed but kind
type; Aya
>the fighter of the group. Mana, who had been with the project
from
the very beginning, was the ideal choice for leader...
besides, she'd
>shown more of a knowledge of martial arts than Mia. Not that it
meant
much for the show, however...
>
 It reinforced a handful of stereotypes, but it was still great

>casting, if she dared say so herself. So what? Now, she had a
big
enough budget, so she could turn out whatever she wanted.
"Okay,
>troops. Our first order of business is to go to that toy show, so
we
can kick off the marketing campaign and introduce our toy line.
This
>is gonna be great!"

> Mia hadn't meant to let that last remark out into the open,
but
everyone else felt the same way, so she let it pass.
>
 "They'd better not make an ugly doll of me..."
>
 "It's a general rule, Hitomi. All action figures AREN'T
supposed
>to look anything like the characters they represent."

> "Don't worry, Hitomi-chan!" bubbled Yukie. "I'm sure
they'll
make a kawaii doll of you!" Hitomi merely stared at her.

>
 Mia was less confident. "We'll have to wait and see. But for

>now, let's just put on the new brooches and prepare for the show,
for
we've got a lot to promote!"
>
 Yukie was practically jumping up and down for joy as she
received
>her new brooch. This... costume jewelry? actually had what
looked
like real gold trim rather than the cheap yellow-and-gold
paint she
>was long since used to. Only one thing was wrong about the brooch
-
the jewel set in the middle was supposed to be a ruby, not a
black
>opal. If, she thought, that was what it was. She was certainly
no
expert on jewels... Oh, well... they probably made a mistake.

I'll
>use my old brooch until we can get it fixed. After all, it's only
a
prop...
>

>
 "M'lady, the plan is proceeding well."
>
 "I sure hope so. These are the next-generation prototypes. If

>they fail, I will be... severly *disappointed*..."

> "It will not fail. In fact, if things go well, we stand a
chance
to exercise control over the entire Japanese toy industry."

>
 The chairwoman of the BFC broke tradition long enough to let a

>tight smile escape her lips. Yes, controlling that
particular
industry would be a good thing, indeed. And she also
enjoyed the
>irony of having a team of would-be magical girls as their
personal
tools for evil.
>
 Even if this plan failed, it would still be very useful in
terms
>of entertainment...

> ****

> Kasumi was impressed by the sheer sight of the massive Tokyo
Toy
Show. Never before in her life had she seen so many people
packed in
>one place for just one simple occasion. She felt awkward. She
wasn't
used to mingling among so many people, and besides which,
as Natsumi.
>At least none of the people around her acknowledged this.

> In fact, they had all naturally assumed she was a part
of
someone's show. She was. The Bandai representatives mistakenly

>thought she might be a new Sailor Moon character, and the Capcom
reps
assumed she was the person sent to play Street Fighter Zero
2's
>Sakura, however different from that character she might have
been.

> If she wasn't being mistaken for an established character,
she
was more often than not kept busy by Nabiki, in the midst of

>negotiating a Natsumi T-shirt deal. So, for the first time in
nearly
six hours, Natsumi took her seat in the booth - which was
somewhere
>between the Bandai booth and the Sony booth, a choice location
Nabiki
had made to pick out well in advance - and began to fall
asleep.
>
 "Excuse me?" a diminutive voice asked. "Aren't you Sailor

>Moon?"

> "That's one booth over," Natsumi heard Nabiki say, a slight
note
of disgust in her voice. How was she to market a character
that bore
>so much resemblance to a character that already existed? First
chance
she had, she was going to have to change Natsumi's
costume...
>
 "Thanks! By the way," the little girl told Natsumi, "your
outfit
>is really cute..."

> "Thank you," Natsumi politely murmured, slowly drifting off
into
sleep. Maybe she would even wake up at home, where life would

be
>normal - in as much as life was normal at home.

> ****

> The field, again.

> She still had no idea where she was. Every time her
dreams
carried her here, she had an enshrouded encounter with her
late
>mother. Mother, who was trying to help her come to terms with her
new
powers and abilities...
>
 But there was no mist this time to obscure her view. Her mother

>clearly stood in front of her, and she could see everything about
the
person she cared so much about in fine detail...
>
 "Mother..."
>
 "Kasumi-chan... you should try your best to be strong. Those
you
>care about will soon need your power."

> "But, mother... I care about you."

> "I know, dear. But I'm not the only one who is depending
upon
you."
>
 Kasumi thought she saw a look of ancient wisdom reinforce her

>mother's features. "Believe in yourself, the way you once did
when
you were young... when you were innocent. I believe in you."

>
 That sounded suspiciously like a farewell. "Mother!?" Kasumi

>asked, shocked. Indeed, her mother's image was losing touch
with
reality - if that applied here.
>
 "I believe in you."
>
 Seconds later, all that remained was Kasumi, burying her face
in
>her hands.

> ****

> "Hey, Natsumi... c'mon, wake up!"

> Natsumi yawned. "What is it, Nabiki-chan...?"

> "Well... I've finished all our negotiations, so I thought
you
might enjoy going to see that show being put on by the
'Mystical
>Fighters Sany' group. Y'know, take a break. Relax a little."
And
check out our competition, weak as it may be, Nabiki added in
her
>thoughts.

> "I suppose I could use a break," Natsumi replied, hiding
any
spare feelings left over from her... dream. "Thank you,
Nabiki-chan."
>She knew Nabiki had made a valiant effort all her life to
pretend
she'd come to terms with Mother's death, but then again,
so had she...
>

>
 "Is everyone ready? Good. Okay, I want you all to go on stage

>and make a big impact!"

> "Okay!" the four girls who comprised the Mystical Fighters
Sany
team shouted in unison. This might very well be their big
break;
>after today, they'd be well on their way to be famous...

> As the curtain rose, Yukie bit her lower lip. I hope
everything
works out okay...
>
 The announcer happened to be one of those seasoned

professionals
>who loved going with the old standards. "Are you ready to
rock!?"
she shouted, the stage already growing hazy amidst colored
smoke and
>spotlights.

> The audience, naturally, loved it. "YEAH!!!"

> The girls took their places. "All right! Mystical Fighters
Sany,
MORPH!!!"
>
 Their command worked this time. Black light engulfed each of
the
>girls except for one...

> Yukie was awestruck. The company really had to be behind them
if
this was the caliber of special effects they were going to be
using.
>But why wasn't she getting the special-effects treatment? This,
too,
struck Mia as being strange. Yukie broke character for a
second to
>see what Hitomi was doing, maybe pick up a cue of her own...
but...
but there was something *different* about her friend's
transformation.
>Hitomi's usual countenance was gone, replaced by a sneer of pure
evil,
instead.
>
 All Yukie could do was abandon her act and scream.
>

> "Wow, they sure've got some great special effects,"
Nabiki
remarked. They're better than I thought they would be,
certainly
>much better than that awful show... I may have to watch out for
these
people.
>
 Natsumi had seen something else entirely. "Something's wrong,

>Nabiki..."

> "Eh?" The comment took Nabiki by surprise. She hated that.
"What
is it?"
>
 "SOMEBODY HELP ME!!!"
>
 "It must be the youma again! Those girls..." Natsumi yelled,

>seperating from the crowd and taking a running leap onto the
stage.
Another threat. I hope you're right, mother. I need your
strength.
>
 Nabiki shrugged. "Geez, talk about your irony. Magical girls

>fighting for evil..." She'd seen evil magical girls before, but
the
concept was rare.
>

>
 Mia was frozen with horror as her once-Human friends stood upon

>the stage, laughing a sinister laugh. Yukie was trying to
find
whatever she could to hide behind - the flimsy stage props

>notwithstanding. Both Mia and Yukie were incredibly
frightened,
though Mia tried to reassert some control over the
situation. "Mana,"
>she forced herself to say. "What in the world are you doing?
This
isn't in the script!"
>
 "Scripts?" Mana-youma said in a voice that was clearly no
longer
>that of the Mana Mia had known. "Who needs a script? We're
doing
improv now... and we're going to DESTROY this toy show.
Isn't that

>right, girls?"

> "But..." Yukie dared to speak up. "Hitomi! Aya! Mana...
we're
friends! We're supposed to be the good guys, aren't we? Why
would
>you want to do something so... evil?" She was crying now,
whether
from an overload of emotion or the blasted special-effects
smoke, she
>didn't know. Or care.

> Hitomi-youma studied her for a brief moment. "You always
were
such an optimist... We're doing this because we WANT to! No
big
>reason! Now, prepare to die--"

> "I don't think so!"

> "Huh?" The three youma raised their heads in unison. "Who
said
that?"
>
 "Magical girls stand for all that is good in Humanity, and not

>the evil that you seem to represent. I will not have you tarnish
the
good name of the magical girls..."
>
 Natsumi's dramatic entrance had been made, Nabiki thought. One

>point for Natsumi.

> "I'll put an end to your evil, for in the name of love...
I'm
Natsumi, the magical girl!" Natsumi's trademarked - and it had
been
>trademarked, for Nabiki had seen to it - bright green energy began
to
flare around her as she prepared for her attack. "Love...
Power--"
>
 "No!! They're not monsters...! They're my friends!" Yukie

>insisted, teardrops streaming from her face as she interposed
herself
between Natsumi and the group of youma.
>
 "Now's our chance! Dark Opal... Burst!" Aya leapt to the

>attack, loosing a beam of dark energy toward Natsumi. Distracted
by
Yukie, Natsumi hadn't seen the blast coming and took the full
brunt of
>it. The blast knocked her into a wall, where she slumped to
the
ground, unconscious.
>
 "Good work, Aya! Now, Hitomi, finish this interfering magical

>girl off..."

> "Yes, Mana."

> "Hitomi-chan!" Yukie pleaded. "Hitomi-chan! Please... don't
hurt
her!"
>
 "Out of my way, Yukie, or I'll be forced to hurt you..." Yukie

>noticed that Hitomi-youma was actually entertaining the idea...
"NOW,
Yukie. You never DID know when to listen..."
>
 "Hitomi-chan... no, don't do it... Please!"
>

>
 "Nabiki? Did you have a hand in organizing this, by any
chance?"
>
 Nabiki frowned. "No. Why do you ask?"
>
 "Well, it's a good idea. Every magical girl needs some kind of

>enemy to battle, and evil magical girls don't come along all
that
often..."
>
 "This is REAL, damn it," Nabiki snapped, setting aside her

>business concerns for the moment. She didn't know if Kasumi was ready
yet to take on three youma at once. Besides, oneechan was still out
>of the battle... Please, Mom, don't let her be hurt...

> ****

> Natsumi came to with a low groan. In front of her stood Yukie,
trying to fend off a youma that looked like she was about to kill them
>both. I've got to help her, but I can't do it. I...

> She heard her mother's voice. Kasumi-chan... you can do
anything. Believe in yourself. You did, once before...
>
 Mother... I can't do this!
>
 Yes, you can.
>
 Resolve tightened Natsumi's features. I'll do it! She began gathering her strength. I'll do it... for you, mother!

> ****

> "Hitomi-chan...!"

> "Enough of this!" Mana-youma ordered. "Finish them BOTH off!"

> All Hitomi-youma could see now was Yukie's face...
"HITOMI-CHAN!!!"
>
 At the last possible instant Hitomi fired the energy blast she'd
>been gathering off toward the roof. "I'm sorry... Yukie-chan... I
can't do this!"
>
 "Hitomi-chan! I knew you had it in you! Are you all right?"

>Yukie tried to run to her friend's side. But the other two youma
blocked her path. "Let me through! Come on, don't you remember who
>you are?"

> "We know who we are," Mana-youma insisted. "All of you have to
die now. Dark Pair..."
>
 "Stop this!" Natsumi yelled, joining the attack-in-progress.

>"Love Healing... Aura!!!" Her brooch glowed with energy as the room
filled with her magic power. Hitomi's black brooch started to change
>to a faint green color as Natsumi's power began to reverse the trio's
youma transformations.
>
 Soon, the youma were Human once more.
>
 "Hitomi-chan!"
>
 "Yukie-chan..." Hitomi broke down in Yukie's embrace. "I'm

>sorry! Please forgive me! I had no control over what we were
doing..."
>
 "It's all right, Hitomi-chan."
>
 "Are all of you okay?" Mia asked, wondering how she'd mop up

>after this mess.

> Mana couldn't meet her friends' gazes. "We're fine..." Trying
to hold back her tears, she wondered how in the world she could be

>so... evil... And she wasn't a method-actor, either. Being evil
just wasn't her.
>
 "What happened to all of you?" asked Natsumi, interrupting the

>uneasy reunion.

> "A... a new sponsor gave us these wonderful new brooches, but...
you don't think they could be the cause of this, do you?"

>
 Natsumi was curious. "Can I see one of the brooches?"
 >
 Mana, Aya and Hitomi checked their brooches; Natsumi's power
 had
 >taken its toll on them. "Sure," Yukie said, rummaging through
 her
pockets for the brooch that had been given to her. "Here's
 mine. I
 >didn't use it because the jewel setting wasn't right, but now I'm
 glad
I didn't use it..."
 >
 Natsumi studied the brooch carefully. Ah, Nabiki had more of a

 >trained eye for this sort of thing... Something caught her eye:
 the
name of the company that had produced the brooch.
 >
 The BFC.
 >

 >
 "You're saying you think the BFC was behind this attack, too?"

 >
 "It looks that way. I don't want to come to any quick

 >conclusions, though."

 > "I do. The BFC's involvement in all these youma attacks and
 more
is too common to be a coincidence. We're going to have to
 keep an eye
 >out for them." Nabiki wore a nervous smile as she and Kasumi
 walked
the path in the Tendo yard.
 >
 "You may be right, Nabiki-chan. The question is, what are we

 >going to do about these attacks?" Kasumi asked. She wanted
 an
answer, since she knew it was only going to be rougher from
 here on
 >out. But she wasn't about to get an answer from Nabiki now...

 > Akane ran to greet them. "Nabiki-oneechan! I've got some
 great
news for you!"
 >
 Nabiki met Akane's words with her usual cool. "What's the
 news?"
 >
 "Our school has entered into a partnership with the BFC to fund

 >special business courses! But that's not the best part...
 they've
asked for *you* to be one of their first students!"

 >
 Nabiki and Kasumi met each other's nervous gaze. They knew the

 >BFC likely had something to do with all the youma-related
 incidents.
What they didn't know, was what reason the BFC would
 have to justify
 >it. Maybe if Nabiki accepted the bait... er, the chance to join
 the
special business courses, they could find out...
 >
 "All right - I guess it's worth a shot."
 >
 To be continued...
 >
[ED: Friends (Nabiki Tendo Version)/Takayama Minami]
 >

 >

 >

4. Epsiode 4 - Back to School Terror!

It was no secret that Furinkan High was gaining a sort of infamous

>reputation throughout Japan. Not that that was a good thing, however.
Any school which featured weird events, senseless, massive property damage
>or martial-arts battles of a caliber a seasoned Hong Kong martial-arts
movie director could only hope for tended to stand out in educational
>circles. Besides which, the principal of Furinkan High was a little...
unusual, to say the least. If you tried to ask people from other schools
>about him, that was as good as description you would get, other than the
general feeling that the person you were asking was grateful that they
>didn't have him as a principal or didn't know him personally.

> Still, there was something strange about the school that kept drawing
people to it. Kyoko knew this for a fact; it was why she had chosen the
>school as an ideal site for a special business juku which would be
co-sponsored by the BFC. Naturally, such a program could build a good name
>for any school and help enhance its reputation with the general public...
which was necessary to help a school succeed.
>
 In theory, Furinkan High's principal should have been overjoyed with
>the opportunity to add the program to his curriculum, right? But the
moment Kyoko read the information profile on Principal Kunou, she guessed
>the going would be tough. Quite tough, indeed. She'd need more than the
initial proposal to convince him.
>
 Principal Kunou's office was surprisingly modest - modest in that he
>didn't insist on having an entire beach compressed into the small room.
Unsurprisingly, he'd made the whole thing up to look like a native beach
>house... because that's exactly what it was; his own little tropic hideaway
deep within the school grounds. One had to climb a ladder lashed together
>from sturdy palm trees just to get to the office, which looked like it had
been built in much the same manner. Often, people thought that it only
>looked that way on the outside... that it was actually a construct cleverly
built to look like it belonged on a remote, uncharted desert isle
>somewhere, instead of standing next to a weathered school building.

> Considering all the damage estimates that occasionally came from this
school, the thing had to have been built far better than it appeared.
>
 Kyoko noted the Principal's unhealthy fixtured on all things Hawaiian,
>especially the sand, beach toys and a generous helping of plants - most of
which she couldn't tell whether or not were plastic, including the one the
>Principal seemed to allow to grow out of the top of his head... good grief,
Kyoko thought; I've stumbled onto the only school in the world with a
>built-in vacation resort. She didn't even want to know what the words on
the diplomas on the wall read. The Hawaiian-type elevator music droning
>on in the background somewhere was nauseating enough. Truly sad...

but she
had come here with business in mind, and she would be damned if she didn't
>follow through with her plans.
> The Principal himself sat at his desk, happily - a little too happily
for Kyoko's consideration - honing the edges of a pair of unusually large
>scissors, all to the tune of some old television show she couldn't recall.
To his credit, though, his whistling didn't seem to be bothered by the
>music going on in the background. Kyoko never could whistle one tune while
listening to another...
>
She thought she was handling the ordeal... er, situation quite well.
>She'd come here prepared for strange behavior. All in the line of duty and
all that stuff. Her assistant, Sayoko, wasn't. Sayoko had read more
>reports about what went on at this school - it was an assistant's job to
stay informed - and what she discovered repulsed her. If that maniac made
>any attempt to cut her hair whatsoever... she'd drain all the lifeblood
energy out of him until a prune looked ten times better than the poor sap.
>
Kyoko smiled inwardly at the discomfort she sensed from Sayoko.

>Sayoko didn't realize that there truly was an intelligence behind the
Principal's insanity. Oh, sure, it was a warped intelligence in what had
>to be the Kunou family tradition, but it still made the man a force to be
reckoned with. It was going to take a bit of shrewd negotiating to get
>what they wanted out of him, and Kyoko felt she held the trump card they
needed.
>
The Principal seemed to let the thought come back to him. "Hey,

>girl!" He saw Sayoko's cringe, and took on a real smile for the first time
since this meeting had started. "I'm sorry, but I can't allow such a
>course to be held at this school unless it actually improves our
educational standard, somehow." He seemed to take pleasure in waving the
>tip of that pair of scissors under Sayoko's chin, teasing her... Sayoko was
doing her best to try to keep her composure. Even if Sayoko *did* blast
>him, she'd never live the whole affair down. Kyoko wouldn't let her.
>
"Are you sure you won't reconsider our offer, Principal Kunou?"

> The man seemed to switch to some kind of Jamaican-mocking mode.
"No-no-no-no-no. I can't allow it."
>
"Perhaps we can make you an offer, then." Kyoko placed herself in
>between Sayoko and the Principal. After all, Sayoko seemed about to lunge
over the desk and do something they'd both regret later on. "Would you
>like to see the benefits our program can provide through a guided tour
through one of our special classes?"
>
"Well..." He thought about it for a very small instant. As if he
>actually had something to do... "I am a busy man." To emphasize his point,
he started to polish an even bigger set of hair-clippers.

"I really must
>stay here to keep this school running under normal conditions."

> Even Sayoko had to laugh at the comment; there was no such thing
as
'normal running conditions' at Furinkan High. The Principal
looked at her
>out of the corner of his eye and began lovingly polishing the
clippers'
blades.
>
 Kyoko wasn't impressed. "Okay, then, how about this? I'm sure
you
>know we can't send you to Hawaii..." She pulled an enlarged
schematic
blueprint out of her briefcase. "But what if... say, we
bring Hawaii to
>Furinkan High?" Under her breath, she added, "No more of this fake
stuff."

> She saw that she had the Principal's attention. He took the
blueprint
from her and, studying it thoroughly, began to laugh.
The same hearty
>laugh that was the first last straw to Sayoko. Was this all some
cruel
joke her co-workers had thought to play on her?
>
 Kyoko knew enough to keep her emotions out of this.
Subordinates had
>to learn the ropes the hard way... She rested her hands on the
table.
"It's such a shame you won't be participating in our
business program," she
>said with mock sincerity. "We were so looking forward to doing
business
with you... all expenses paid, naturally."
>
 She hadn't needed to add the shameless sweet-talk. The thought
of
>turning Furinkan High into New Hawaii was appealing enough to
the
Principal. He signed the papers and left the office at jovial
warp speed,
>an instant before an extremely confused Sayoko could make sense of
exactly
what had happened.
>
 Kyoko knew. She now held complete control over Furinkan High in
the
>palm of her hand... and soon she would have access to the best
natural
resources this simple little district had to offer. Let
the Principal
>think he knew what it meant to have an evil laugh...

>[OP: "The Girl is Magic" (Natsumi Title Theme)Inoue Kikuko]

>
(OP sequence: An unconcerned Kasumi stands in the main walkway
of the
>Tendo yard, sweeping. Soon, Ranma and Akane appear, fighting.
Then
Ryouga, Shampoo and Ukyou join the fray. Genma appears, but
Ranma
>throws him into the pond. Soun sits off to one side, crying.
Akane
slam-dunks Ranma into the pond, and the panda raises a sign
that says,
>"What kept you?" Ranma takes a swipe at him with the
sign.
Finally, Nabiki and Mine appear in the background, seemingly
trying to
>come to a business decision by various means,
including
rock-paper-scissors, as a large BFC building rises out
of clouds of
>dust behind them all.

>Still unconcerned, Kasumi changes into Natsumi and uses her powers
to
sweep the whole mess away at an incredible rate, leaving a
white

>screen for the title logo to fade into.)

> Richard Beaubien
 presents
> Natsumi, the Magical Girl
 Chapter 4: Back to School Terror!
> (embellished by Mike K.)

>
 "I hear that you have been accepted to attend a special
business
>course at school that the BFC has sponsored, Nabiki." Kasumi said,
in the
middle of preparing lunches for Soun and Genma. Sure, they
ate a lot, but
>as long as they were happy, everyone else usually was. It was
currently
the weekend, and the special class was slated to begin
on Monday, with
>Nabiki holding a choice position as one of the initial attendees.
"Are you
sure this is something you want to do, Nabiki-chan?"

>
 "Sure, why not? It could always offer us some important info on
the
>BFC." That, and some sweet blackmail opportunities, too. Nabiki had
no
qualms about ruining a company that counted youma among its
primary
>exports.

> Kasumi sighed, going back to slicing bread. "But, won't you
be
putting yourself at risk? I mean, it does sound to me like it
might be
>a... scheme of some sort."

> Nabiki's face took on that thoughtful look most sentient
beings
dreaded. "I doubt they would pull anything extremely
obvious. It would
>call too much attention to them. Headlines that scream 'BFC Class
Causes
Monster Riot!' are not exactly good for business." She
paused to gauge
>Kasumi's reaction, but Kasumi was taking it all in stride, turning
her
attention to preparing a kettle of tea. "Besides, it's obvious
that the
>BFC has something more sinister in mind with this course. I wouldn't
be
surprised if it was a part of their master plans, Sis."
>
 Kasumi was so surprised by Nabiki's assumption that she dropped
the
>spoon she was holding. "'Master plan'!?"

> "You know; every evil organization has something that it wants
more
than anything else. World domination, utter power, wealth,
the destruction
>of Microsoft, their own postal stamp... maybe they want their
pizzas
delivered in *twenty* minutes or less. But they definitely
want
>something."

> Kasumi was dimly aware of a slight breeze making its way through
the
kitchen as she stopped to think about what Nabiki had said.
Nabiki was
>right, of course - the BFC had to have a hidden agenda.

> Did she have one, too? In her dreams, Mother kept
mentioning
something... having to do with her friends, something
she couldn't
>completely recall. Maybe if she told Nabiki about the dreams, Nabiki
could
help deduce what they meant. Maybe Nabiki could help her
understand why
>the dreams were haunting her in the first place...

> "--Or else they wouldn't be sending so many monsters out to do
their
dirty work. I mean, youma aren't exactly known for their

subtleties..."

>Nabiki paused. She waved a hand in front of Kasumi's face.

"Hey...
Oneechan? Are you there? Hello..."

>
 Kasumi snapped back to the real world. "I'm sorry, Nabiki-chan," she

>sheepishly apologized. "I do understand what you're trying to say... I
think. You seem to believe that the BFC wants something that's special

>about our district and that's why they're doing all these evil things,
right?"

>
 "Right. And I'm hoping this 'business course' can help shed some

>light on what their true motives might be."

> "But you're still taking a tremendous risk."

> "Don't worry; I can take care of myself, Sis. If there's any inside
information that needs to be found or espionage that needs to be done, I'm

>the person for the job." Nabiki confidently left the room. "Oh, by the
way... don't forget that later tonight we really have to pick out a new

>design for that costume of yours. I want to change it to something that
doesn't make you look like Sailor Moon. Copyright lawsuits are terribly

>expensive, you know."

> Astonished by her sister's behavior, Kasumi didn't say a word.

> ****

> "Yes... by all means, Kyoko. Please do explain," the chairwoman
purred with a smooth, condescending tone from behind her large

>stained-mahogany desk. Kyoko cringed; one did not look forward to being
called into the chairwoman's office to explain what they were currently

>doing and why. The chairwoman already wielded a considerable amount of
power. She had obviously designed her office with the full intent of

>intimidating anyone who stepped into it. More troubling was the fact that
the office monitors around the room could be playing anything: your

>failures - how had she gotten video footage of those? - a close-up of your
extremely nervous face, or something else equally as humbling... "Perhaps

>you would like to explain to me why you have failed in acquiring new
resources and have helped encourage the casting of some suspicion on our

>company?"

> "I have no excuse to offer, m'lady. It was poor planning that led to
these defeats." Kyoko stepped back from the desk and bowed before her

>leader, hoping for another chance to prove herself. "I do have another
plan that will succeed. A plan which will procure us all that we need from

>this area..."

> "Very well, Kyoko. I will allow you to have another chance.
However--" the chairwoman paused abruptly, traces of a faint smile

>appearing on her face, although Kyoko failed to see it. "Do not fail. You
must remember that our company is a reputable one, and we do not want

>ourselves caught up in any affair that might tarnish that

reputation. Do
>
you understand?"
>
 Kyoko bit her lip. "I understand completely, m'lady. I won't fail
>you again." She understood, too, what the chairwoman had been implying by
>her final statement. Other things were to be put at risk before the life
>of the company...

> After Kyoko left the office, the chairwoman poked at a button on the
>intercom. "Mine, I need to see you."
>
 Shortly afterward, Mine materialized in front of the desk.
"Yes,
>m'lady?"

> The chairwoman finished reviewing the videotape of her conversation
>with Kyoko. "Kyoko claims to have another plan. Perhaps your new
>operative should keep an eye on her and her plan to ensure that she does
>not fail."
>
 "I shall."
> "And, if she does fail... please resolve the situation so that nothing
>ends up on our company doorstep."
>
 Mine nodded, and vanished. The chairwoman turned to gaze out her
>large window - made of martial-artist-proof glass - at the beautiful Nerima
>skyline. She had left the videotape in pause mode. "I understand
>completely, m'lady. I won't fail you again." A grave look crossed her
>face. "Damn you, Kyoko!" she cursed. "I'm not going to let you ruin
>thirty good years of work on my part! I *will* get what I want..."

> ****

> "Well, *sure* it's going to be difficult. But, hey - you do owe me a
>few favors. Just tell yourself that this should cancel out most of the
>debts you owe me."

> "Look, just see what you can dig up on the BFC, its background and
>past... *anything* that you think I might find of interest. We'll discuss
>fees later. Right. Nice talking to you too. Bye, now..."

> Nabiki hung up the phone. She was becoming more and more confused
>over the company and its policies as time passed. She always thought she
>had known what the BFC really wanted from Nerima. Hell, it had to be one
>thing, right? Martial artists. Fighters were unofficially Nerima's
>number-one import - and export. Nabiki couldn't fathom why the company
>wanted martial artists, though it had been the underlying theme in all
>their confrontations. An attempt to coerce Ranma and Akane into selling
>pogs - who bought those anymore, anyway? If Nabiki had thought there was a
>profit in selling... *pogs*, she would have cornered the market months ago.
>As it stood, she still had a couple boxes of the blasted things crammed
>into a dark corner of her closet. She was considering *giving* the things
>to Happosai for firewood.
>
 A cooking contest for martial artists.
>
 A takeover of a sentai show. Well, two out of three ain't bad.

>
 But why martial artists? Why would a company that had some

secret tie

> somewhere to the forces of Darkness need martial artists? World control?
Well, that's what all power-seekers usually wanted, but how was the BFC

> expecting to do that with *martial artists*? Including Ranma and his
crew... good luck trying to control the world with Kunou-chan as your

> leader. As a puppet... now, that was a different story entirely.

> There had to be more to the story than just that. Nabiki didn't
believe in simple explanations. Not when it came to big business.

> Whatever the BFC had in mind was definitely a lot bigger than breaking
bricks and sticks with bare hands. Otherwise, they could have done it

> themselves. And if she could only determine what they had in mind for
everyone, she could help put a stop to them before somebody was actually

> hurt by these youma attacks.

> Besides, a lot of those people owed her money...

> ****

> Kyoko lifted her head, intending to take a break from looking over the
class lists for the new class. "Sayoko? Where are you?" The names

> weren't really all that interesting, a bland who's-who of Furinkan High;
nothing or no one truly special, but all the same a good power base for the

> BFC to begin its takeover of the school.

> "I'm right here," Sayoko said, off to Kyoko's side.

> "How many times have I told you not to do that?"

> Sayoko was confused. "Do what?"

> "Never mind. Here," Kyoko passed the class list to her assistant.
"This is the list of people who will be taking our class. Please study it;

> I'd like to hear which ones you believe would be best for our first wave of
'new recruits.'"

>
 "Hai." Sayoko slowly flipped through the roster. Mostly ordinary

> people, nothing to get excited over. And then, on the last page, there
was... "**HIM!?!**"

>
 Kyoko sighed. "Let me guess: you've found the entry for 'Kunou

> Tatewaki, age 17,' right? He *is* one of the students who will be taking
the class..."

>
 "No, no, NO!! Anyone but him! If we have to contend with another

> Kunou, I'm not going to be responsible for anything that happens! Can't I
sit this one out?"

>
 Kyoko turned a frosty glare at her assistant. Sayoko merely brushed

> it off. "We both have to go through with this. You know that. There's
no backing out now. If you bail out on me now, we stand the risk of a

> rather unpleasant early retirement, if you know what I mean..."

> Okay, so maybe Sayoko didn't want to have an 'early retirement.' No
one she knew of actually did retire from the BFC. Must save the company a

> lot of money in gold watches, she thought sourly. The BFC's early
retirement plan was *not* a pleasant experience, more so if

one had failed
>his or her superiors in the slightest way.

> Which to choose? Failure of the plan, or the dreaded Kunou family?
She thanked Fate that the Black Rose of the family, Kodachi, attended a
>private school. From reports it seemed that didn't stop her from dropping
by Furinkan High whenever she felt like it, but it was a good sign that
>Sayoko wouldn't have to worry about Kodachi attending the course. Not that
any of the Kunou clan struck her as having potential for business.
>
 "Don't worry. I'll be here to watch your back," Kyoko assured her.
>Some assurance. This *was* Tatewaki Kunou they were talking about...

> ****

> Visitors to Ukyou's familiar restaurant found a strange - but not
unusual - sight: a 'Closed' sign. Weekends were often one of the best
>times of the week for her to have her restaurant open, so why have it
closed now? She hadn't posted any mention of an upcoming trip anywhere,
>like she usually did whenever she was about to leave on a risk-all trip to
sell okonomiyaki somewhere within Japan. Some insiders assumed she picked
>her locations along the same lines as Ryouga picking travel plans. But
they were wrong...
>
 Not that Ukyou cared much anymore; she had far more important things
>to worry about than this small restaurant. It was in someone else's hands
now. Let them pour their souls into it for a lousy weekly profit - she was
>now a BFC junior executive.

> Mine was toying with her. "Ukyou? Tell me, what do you *really*
think of this offer? Two box tops for an authentic Ninja shuriken... now
>that's a good offer."

> "Whatever," Ukyou swept the box tops and prize aside. "I know you
didn't come here for this, Mine-san. You didn't take me on as a junior
>executive just to have me look at kids' cereal prizes all day."

> Mine hesitated. "You're absolutely correct. Keep in mind, Ukyou,
that an executive's duties can encompass every decision that needs to be
>made in a company like ours, from the high-level to the trivial. Even a
cereal box-top can further your career. I should know; I sent in enough
>of them..."

> Ukyou boggled. "You're kidding."

> A smile formed on Mine's face, decided it was in poor company and
left. "Yes." After a quick pause, she continued. "Ukyou, I've decided to
>give you your first real assignment."

> "I'm ready."

> "I have arranged for you to attend a special business course taught by
two of our other execs. We suspect they may attempt to double-cross or
>cheat the company." Mine hesitated. "If that's the case, I want you to
quietly eliminate them without bringing suspicion upon our

company."

>
 "I understand." Ukyou offered a sharp salute-like gesture and retired

>to the back room of her restaurant to prepare for class. To prepare a plan
of action and the possibility of company downsizing. It was her job.

>
 Mine sighed; no one was there to hear it but her. "There is no

>turning back now, Kuonji Ukyou. Your Human life is no more..."

> ****

> Patience had never been one of Tatewaki Kunou's best qualities. It
wasn't one of his worst, either. He always had to get exactly what he

>wanted, whenever he wanted it, no matter what the cost. He was quite
amazingly dense for a young man his age, often ignoring the glaringly

>obvious details in his pursuit of desire - which tended to explain his
obsession in courting Akane Tendo and the girl whom, no matter how many

>times he had heard her name, he insisted on calling 'the pig-tailed girl.'
>
Rather, 'goddess.' He didn't believe in placing the loves of his life

>among mere commoners, under which he counted Ranma Saotome. And Kodachi,
though he hadn't decided yet where he placed his sister in the grand class

>structure.

> It was this combination of qualities that contributed to the scene
Kunou was creating at this moment in time. The first day of the special

>business class, and it almost seemed Kunou thought he was too good to sit
in the chair assigned to him. "Why should I have to attend a mere business

>school when Kunou Tatewaki, the wealthiest of the upperclassmen here,
already knows how to make money? I do not need to know how to make more

>money. The school should be well-advised to pay *me* to teach this course,
not amateurs like them."

>
 Nabiki was already beginning to feel queasy. She saw it coming from

>the moment Kunou-chan entered the classroom, amid his usual fanfare. If
anything, she was privately surprised he hadn't settled in to his epic

>tales of justified battles against that representative of Darkness itself,
Ranma Saotome... no, wait, he was firing one of those up now.

>
 Well, no one ever said school was boring with any of the people she

>knew all too well around. She decided to size up the other attendees and
see who else had been lured into this potential trap.

>
 Naturally, there was Kunou, who was making himself stand out like a

>sore thumb. In the back sat one person, who seemed vague to Nabiki.
Nabiki concentrated, narrowing her eyes, and saw that it was Ukyou. Or was

>it? Whoever she was, she looked enough like Ukyou, yet was dressed in a
smart red business suit. Ukyou wasn't well-known for her wardrobe, and the

>suit would have seemed to prove it.

> Maybe Ukyou had given up on trying to win Ranma from Akane. That

left
what, about seventy-five more girls in line for his heart?

>
 Kunou was sounding more and more like a complete idiot by the minute,

>if that was possible. Nabiki tried to hide a laugh; this obviously wasn't
going to be a traditional business class. Otherwise, Kunou-chan might have

>been outside long before now reciting his long-winded speeches to the two
buckets of water he'd be holding as punishment. Maybe there was potential

>for entertainment here after all...

> Sayoko didn't think that was the case. To her, Kunou was far more
annoying than that psychotic father of his. She felt pity in her for the

>pig-tailed girl and Akane. Whoever they were, they didn't deserve this.
She wondered again why she just didn't blast him on first sight.

>"Kunou-san," she forced herself to say, politely, "As much as we find the
epic tales of your love..... *interesting*, can we please get started?"

>
 "Forgive me. I did not know I was rambling. I can be so sidetracked

>by the loves of my life so easily... Fortunately, I do not ramble on long."

> "Yes..." Sayoko's brow furrowed. She squeezed another bubble on her
sheet of bubble-wrap. "I'm sure you don't. All right, everyone, let's

>begin. Can anyone explain the--"

> "Alas... yes, I can explain why I love them. My love for them is like
the wind..."

>
 It's like the wind, all right, Nabiki smirked. Very strong, but

>loud and hollow.

> Sayoko facefaulted. *Why* did she have to get stuck with such a royal
twit? She squeezed together more bubbles on the bubble-wrap. The

>stress-aid was helping her remain in control. When it ran out, not even
Heaven would be able to help save that idiot...

>
 Ukyou's watchful glare remained stubbornly in place. It was clear

>from the start that this plan was going to fall apart and lead like a trail
of fallen dominoes back to the BFC's front porch if it was allowed to

>continue. She couldn't allow that. She would put an end to this plan
before it incriminated her company. All she needed to do was wait for the

>proper moment to strike. The BFC did *not* tolerate failure...

> ****

> At the Tendo dojo, meanwhile, everything was business as usual. Soun
and Genma were once again wrapped up in their daily shogi game. Kasumi,

>however, was standing alone in the kitchen, simmering. Given the
circumstances, it was perfectly understandable. Nabiki was all alone

>inside that BFC-sponsored class. It had to be an extremely obvious trap,
right? She still had no justification for charging off in her Natsumi form

>and pay the class a visit.

> Even if Nabiki felt Kasumi's save-Nabiki-heroics would be bad for

her
image.

>
 It could be a trap. Nabiki could be in danger.

>
 The thought repeated again and again inside Kasumi's mind. Something

>was going to happen, she could feel it! If Nabiki was hurt, she wouldn't
be in any condition to cash in on Natsumi no matter how polished her image

>was. I do have an errand to run at a market close to the school...

> "Father! Mr. Saotome! I'm stepping out to run an errand!"

Kasumi
yelled, picking up her brooch and running out the door.

>
 Soun turned to say good-bye, which allowed Genma another opportunity

>to make a move that was against the rules of the game. In turning back to
the board, Soun had long since learned that when playing Genma, you watched

>the board first and *then* your opponent. What little good that did, with
all these distractions. "Saotome, was that an illegal move you just made?"

>
 Genma didn't reply. He couldn't; for in front of Soun sat a rather

>ridiculous-looking panda wrapped around a beach ball. Soun settled in for
a nice, painful facefault.

>

>
 "So, would anyone here happen to know the basic law of *supply* and

>*demand*?" Sayoko prodded, hoping that someone other than Kunou would
answer. Nabiki raised her hand - she did know the answer, but it came too

>late. Kunou was already on his feet with an answer. "The answer is all
too obvious. I demand something, and it is given to me."

>
 That sent the entire class crashing to the floor in disbelief. Nabiki

>and Ukyou were the only ones to keep their composure, large beads of
nervous sweat forming on their foreheads all the same.

Kunou-chan was

>getting out of hand. So much for learning anything from this class. In
the rear of the class Ukyou casually continued to wait, knowing a breaking

>point was coming soon.

> Sayoko reached for her bubble paper, but it had been melted by a stray
bolt of lightning from one of Kunou's dramatic poses. It finally pushed

>Sayoko off the edge. "THAT'S IT! I'VE HAD IT UP TO **HERE** WITH YOU!!!"
she yelled at the top of her lungs, a mysterious blue aura taking shape

>around her. Everyone began to panic, save for Nabiki, Kunou and Ukyou.
Nabiki was, thanks to Ranma, used to living with hair-trigger fights and

>strange auras. Still, it ought to be fun to watch Kunou-chan get trashed
by someone, again... On the other hand, Nabiki wondered why the BFC agent

>had dropped the ruse so soon. Perhaps this wasn't part of the BFC master
scheme after all.

>
 "PREPARE TO SUFFER A MILLION UNIQUE KINDS OF PAIN, YOU IDIOT!!"

>Sayoko exclaimed, quivering. The blue glow washed over her, revealing her
true youma form. That did it. The entire class was

screaming now. Ukyou,
>Kunou and Nabiki watched the situation taking place closely, for completely
different reasons. "AS FOR THE REST OF YOU, PREPARE TO SERVE THE--"
>
 "Everyone, RUN!!!" Ukyou suddenly yelled at the top of her lungs.
>The class didn't need to be told five times. Within one second the entire
class was out the door and long gone, except for Nabiki, Ukyou and Kunou.
>The latter was still frozen in place with a wide-eyed vacant stare on his
face.
>
 Could there be a clue to the BFC's master plan here, somewhere?

>Unfortunately, before Nabiki had a chance to examine everything closely,
something oddly human-shaped came crashing through the window. Now who did
>she know that made entrances like that? Better get out the list...

> Never mind. Natsumi placed herself in the middle of the room.

> "I will NOT allow you to use a classroom as a place to terrorize
innocent people!" Nabiki winced at the statement; it wasn't like
>Kunou-chan was exactly an innocent. "For love and justice, I'm Natsumi,
the magical girl, and your final bell is about to ring!"

>
 Sayoko sighed. "All right, all right, I'll fight you. But could you
>do me a favor? Could you let me put this FOOL out of everyone's misery,
first!?" She leapt toward Kunou and tried to imbed a kick between his
>narrow-minded eyes. Kunou instinctively drew his bokken, but failed to
react in time and was launched through the far wall. Sayoko laughed
>insanely, wiping her hands free of dust. "There! Now that *that's* over
with--"
>
 "Natsumi KICK!!"
> Sayoko was thrown in the opposite direction Kunou had taken. Natsumi
chanced a look at Nabiki. "Get Kunou to safety, *now*!"

>
 For a second Nabiki scowled, wondering why she was always the one to
>have to drag Kunou-chan to safety. Ranma and Akane always left him
imbedded in the ground somewhere... She heard his voice in the distance -
>something about him defeating the monster for the honor of the Blue Thunder
and Furinkan High. She resigned herself; Kunou-chan was dangerous when he
>wasn't running on all his cylinders. Which, she smirked, was most of the
time. Guess it was about time for an engine overhaul.
>
 Still, Nabiki didn't want to spend time lugging Kunou-chan around and
>keep an eye on him, not when Kasumi was putting her life on the line.
Maybe Ukyou could help her dump Kunou-chan somewhere in a straitjacket and
>chains... wait. Where had Ukyou gone?

> Ukyou had remained in the room. Something about Ukyou made her
practically invisible unless you knew she was there, and were looking
>directly at her. Natsumi barely acknowledged Ukyou's presence in her

mind;
perhaps Ukyou was part of someone else's concern. No matter
- Ukyou wasn't
>a threat.

> Natsumi began to radiate a green aura. She was about to release
it,
intending to have it consume the youma, when a large spatula
came down upon
>her head from behind. Natsumi slumped to the floor, unconscious.
Sayoko
was surprised, noting the approaching Ukyou.
>
 "So the rumors of an agent sitting in on the class were true,"
Sayoko
>straightened. "Thanks--" She never got the chance to complete
her
sentence. For a smaller spatula, bathed in dark energy, was
now a part of
>her midsection. Ukyou was still approaching, a vague, sinister
grin
becoming apparent on her face. "Why..... why?" Sayoko asked,
coughing up
>dark blood.

> "The BFC does not tolerate failure." Ukyou proceeded to slice
and
dice what was left of the fallen youma. Nothing was left but
Sayoko's
>final wail as Kyoko appeared.

> "Who are you, and why have you done this?"

> "Sad to say, you've been downsized," Mine laughed, appearing in
the
room. "Now, prepare to die..." She formed a ball of energy
within her
>cupped hands and aimed it at Kyoko. To Mine and Ukyou's surprise,
Kyoko
sat in the spot Sayoko had vacated and began to cry. As she
took the full
>force of the blast, her last words faded away with her.
"Sayoko-chan...
Mine-chan... Forgive me..."
>
 Ukyou's face settled back into its original serious expression.
"What
>about Natsumi?" She studied Natsumi's still form. Something there
seemed
familiar to her, even innocent, but there was no room for
that now.
>
 "Leave her for now. We need to end this misguided plan and
delete
>any ties that might reflect suspicion onto the company."

> ****

> Natsumi came to with an incredibly painful splitting headache -
she'd
never fallen victim to a whack on the head from Ukyou's
giant spatula
>before, and wasn't prepared for it, both physically and mentally -
and no
idea how long she had been out. Was the youma still here,
on the loose?
>She sprang to her feet. No... only people talking to one another.
And off
to one side, there were a couple of teachers being
interrogated by the
>police. Natsumi dragged herself over to them, wondering if they knew
what
had hit her.
>
 "Ah! The hero of the hour has finally awakened!" Mine
exclaimed,
>rushing to give Natsumi a hug. "You're the one who saved my life!
I'd
like to thank you for taking care of that nasty youma." Mine
bowed. At
>the lowest point of the bow, she smiled. She had always been a good
actor,
even in high school...
>
 Natsumi didn't know what to make of the situation. Who was
this? She
>hadn't been here earlier... at least not that Natsumi had

seen.
"Thanks..." she near-mumbled out of politeness. Though she hadn't been the
>one to destroy the youma. It was a moot point, for the crowd
was
surrounding her, asking for her autograph... Mine went on with
her story to
>the police. Natsumi could hear bits and pieces of it, though the
noise of
the crowd soon put a stop to that.
>
 "Those monsters tied me up before my class was about to begin.
I
>suspect they were sent by the Sappirio company, somehow, in an
attempt to
tarnish the BFC's good name. I'm just glad that girl
was there to help
>save our company's reputation."
 Natsumi withdrew her breath.
Her, *help* the company that had been
>the reason for most of her fights in the first place? Something
wasn't
right here. She had more questions than answers, and there
was only one
>person who might have an answer or two to spare.

> She offered a quick farewell, then departed, much to
the
disappointment of her new fans.
>

>
 "C'mon, sis. It's obviously another lie." Nabiki was actually

>helping with the preparation of dinner, slicing up carrots. Kasumi
noted
how well Nabiki handled herself in the kitchen and wondered
why Nabiki
>didn't help more often.

> "I know, but what could they be up to?" asked Kasumi, not
expecting
an answer. One normally did not destroy one's own trap.
She was beginning
>to think that the BFC was more than just a bunch of crackpot
monsters out
for world domination. "I don't know why they bothered
to spare me."
>
 "You became a key part of their plan. With you there to play
hero, no
>one noticed them shifting the blame onto another company." That
reminds
me; I'd better dump those shares of Sappirio stock, Nabiki
added in her
>thoughts, throwing the carrots into the pot. "They're more
interested at
the moment in keeping their reputation clean than
killing you, which means
>you probably haven't made that much of an impact on their
resources."

> Kasumi exhaled, planning to lose her big-business concerns
in
preparing tonight's meal. More often than not, she had to do a
lot of
>cooking - Father and Genma ate so much, and Ranma was gearing up to
be that
way, too. "Before I forget... thank you for helping me
cook, Nabiki."
>
 "No problem. You can repay me by modeling the new costumes I
put
>together for you in the dojo tonight." Nabiki spread some seasoning
over
a dish of curry.
>
 "But, won't Father or someone else notice!?"
>
 "Don't worry, they'll all be gone tonight. I think they're
going to
>try to put a stop to someone's latest plan... was it Happosai? I
never
know..."
>
 "Dear me..." Kasumi sighed. Maybe Nabiki's fashion show wasn't
a bad

>idea. It would preoccupy her for one night, anyway. "All right, Nabiki.
I'll see what you have in mind. I will do it as long as you don't give me
>a skirt that's too short. The last thing I need is to give people another
reason to stare at me..."
>
 Nabiki pursed her lips. "Okay." She could see the yen drain away
>from the 'H' market. Didn't all magical girls have some kind of short
skirt?
>

>
 Late night found Mine one of the last few people remaining in the BFC
>main office complex this evening. She sat in her office, drifting from
picture to picture, plaque to plaque, and back, on her wall. One picture
>kept drawing her attention. "Junior Executives of the Year," someone had
scribbled across the thin white border at the bottom. In the picture were
>two people: Mine, and her closest friend at the time... one who had signed
her name and the words 'Friends Forever' next to her on the picture.
>
 Kyoko.
>
 "Kyoko-chan..." In tears, Mine ripped the picture from the wall and
>willed it to spontaneously combust within her hands. The last tie she had
to her former life was now gone. From this point on, she would never cry
>again.

> end

>[ED: "Friends" (Nabiki Tendo Version)Takayama Minami]
>

5. Epsiode 5 - Idol Scramble!

> One wouldn't know it from mere sight alone, but it was one of the
biggest events to sweep through Hokkaido this season. Certainly, many
>thought of it as the event of the year. Not even Hokkaido's natural
beauty could compare to a star of this magnitude, some thought, and
>Tomizawa Ami was one of the most sought-after idol stars in Japan
today.
>
 Tomizawa's promoters had planned to turn Hokkaido's splendor into
>a key component of the outdoor concert. The concert itself was an
attempt to bring in money from people who usually had to travel to
>Tokyo just to hear the idol sing.

> It had all, innocently enough, seemed like a very good idea
>
tickets sold out faster than anyone could hand them out.
>
 One of the main problems was that the site Tomizawa's promoters
>had chosen hadn't really been designed with a concert in mind. But
then, Mother Nature wasn't an idol promoter, now, was she?
>
 Gosunkugi Hikaru didn't care about things like this one way or
>another right about now. For he was an aspiring fan of Tomizawa

Ami,
enough to spend a great deal of money on traveling to Hokkaido by
>himself just to hear her sing.

> Unfortunately, he was stuck outside the primary washroom for the
entire concert setup... not much more than an outhouse, in his

>opinion. He'd spent nearly fifteen minutes waiting outside the
washroom for just *one* person to leave and listening to people say,

>"Now THAT'S what a fanboy *really* looks like!"

> Hikaru, in fact, was a reserved and shy individual for the most
part - until it came to something he felt passionate about, like

>Tomizawa Ami. All this time spent waiting here could be better spent
in front of the stage waiting for Ami to make her appearance... or

>*on* the stage, if they allowed it.

> He had a look on his face that would have scared even Saotome
Ranma. "COME ON!" he bellowed. "WHAT ARE YOU DOING IN THERE?"

>Hikaru was about to break down the door - until he realized the hard
way that the door opened the other way. A young man wearing a

>familiar yellow-and-black bandanna tied around his forehead, matching
the clothes he wore below that point.

>
 The Eternally Lost Boy had arrived.

>
 "Ranma? Is that you?" Ryouga's voice trailed off as he realized

>Ranma wasn't in the area. Where was he, anyway? "Uh... would you
mind terribly telling me where I am?"

>
 "Where ARE you!? WHERE ARE YOU!?" Hikaru near-exploded,

>forgetting for the moment that he was speaking to someone who could
bring him back into rational sanity in a less-than-painless manner.

>"This is the BIGGEST idol concert of the year, and I have to wait
FIFTEEN MINUTES out here for you to finish whatever it is you're doing

>in the ONLY WASHROOM HERE! THAT'S where you are!!"

> Ryouga cocked his head, looking at Hikaru in curiosity. "I want
to know where I am. We wouldn't happen to be anywhere near the Tendo

>Dojo, would we?"

> "NO! This is Hokkaido, you IDIOT!" Hikaru continued to rant,
rivalling some of Soun's best outbursts. Godzilla, king of monsters,

>would be proud.

> The next person in line, however, took advantage of Hikaru's
temper to slip into the bathroom, flashing a quick Victory sign to

>Hikaru as he shut the door... leaving a teetering Hikaru to fall to
his knees in front of the door, wailing. Ryouga stared at him for a

>moment, then finally gave up on the boy and left him to rant in peace.

> Hokkaido, Ryouga thought, walking on. I'm back in Hokkaido
again. If I'm lucky I can make it to the Tendo Dojo before Akane-san

>leaves for school next week. Oof--

> The latter, because someone had had the nerve to place a stage

in
between him and his destination. No problem; he figured he could just
>plow through it like he normally did. Until the track lights
dimmed...
>
 "And now, the moment you've all been waiting for your entire

>lives..." the PA system blared to life, annoying all of those who
thought it had been dead. It didn't matter much, as the crowd was
>also roaring to life - drowning out Ryouga's attempts to ask people
where the blasted exit was. "Sami Records is bursting at the seams to
>present..."

> A long, dramatic pause, followed by an understudy which wasn't
quite as dramatic.
>
 "The idol concert of your year and mine... please welcome,

>Tomizawa... Ami!"

> Ami took the stage to the sound of thunderous applause and a few
cat calls here and there, which she took in stride. Ryouga was

>surprised to find her alluring, with her short blue-black hair and a
fuku strangely reminiscent of one he knew a certain other Ami to wear
>on occasion... What, did he have it in for girls with short,
bluish-black hair? Akane-san...
>
 Apparently, the crowd before the stage had no similar

>commitments. In their hearts, Tomizawa was ultra-ultra-kawaii and
there were also a few nose-bleeds - though these resulted more from
>angry girlfriends than thoughts of... well, you know. If not, then
don't ask - your authors have no desire to turn this into the
>slightest of lemon stories, no matter how much Nabiki pays us.

> Ami knew how to play the part well. Too well, in fact; she was
thoroughly enjoying the atmosphere and acting cuter than ever Humanly
>thought possible to encourage the crowd. She had to let the noise
drop back down to tolerable levels before coyly announcing her first
>number from behind the microphone stand. "I'd like to thank all of
you very much for coming here today! Why don't we begin with an old
>favorite of mine... 'Warrior of the Heart.'"

> The band struck up a familiar old tune, and the crowd cheered
once more as Ami settled into her routine. Ryouga found that even he
>liked the music, although he never cared much for idol singers.

Being lost most of the time - or as someone else in his family once
>put it, ninety-seven-point-eighty-five percent of the time - he'd
been able to sample an amazing range of cultural and other brands of
>music, although he was often only looking for the way back to
wherever the heck it was he was supposed to be, whenever it was he
>was supposed to be there.

> He was so wrapped up in the music that he almost missed

the
warning signs telling him danger was about to make an appearance.
>And here he hadn't even bought a ticket... Instinctively, he leapt
onto the stage - where WAS Security, anyway? - and pushed Ami to
>safety.

> Seconds later, a mass of debris occupied the space where the
idol singer had stood.
>
 The crowd was stunned, perhaps more so than Ami. Her jaw

>dropped when she caught sight of what could very well have crushed
her. Realizing where she was, she quickly came to her senses and
>found Ryouga. He saved my life... gee, he's kinda cute, isn't he?

> She made her way over to him, reassuring the crowd that she was
all right even if she wasn't sure, herself. Neither was the crowd.
>They were all working themselves up in a frenzy of what could and
might have happened to their precious idol. "I'm all right," she
>insisted. "...thanks to this young man." Ami gratefully took
Ryouga's hand and gave him a quick kiss on the cheek, causing the boy
>to lose everything on the spot and faint. She looked down at him out
of pure surprise, blinking... not having expected to have this kind
>of effect on anyone.

> Of course, in the process she'd also managed to turn Ryouga into
the newest target of the Tomizawa Ami Fan Club. Any and all rivals
>in their quest to make Ami theirs could not be accepted... and they
went after rivals with a vengeance.
>
 But somewhere above the chaos of the concert and the

>plotting-in-progress of a fan club to somehow do away with a new
mortal enemy, a mysterious figure stood in the shadows among the
>rafters - which was theoretically impossible keeping in mind that the
stage was an *outdoor* stage, but the figure decided to go against
>logic and stand in the shadows nonetheless.

> He glanced down upon the stage, wondering if he should take
another show at obtaining more idol energy from the girl. No, better
>to not chance it. She had a protector now, and a formidable one at
that. Oh, well, he'd have better luck with the next idol. There

>were more than enough idol singers in Japan to suit his needs...

>[OP: "The Girl is Magic" (Natsumi Title Theme)Inoue Kikuko]

>
(OP sequence: An unconcerned Kasumi stands in the main walkway of the
>Tendo yard, sweeping. Soon, Ranma and Akane appear, fighting. Then
Ryouga, Shampoo and Ukyou join the fray. Genma appears, but Ranma
>throws him into the pond. Soun sits off to one side, crying. Akane
slam-dunks Ranma into the pond, and the panda raises a sign that says,

>"What kept you?" Ranma takes a swipe at him with the sign.
Finally, Nabiki and Mine appear in the background, seemingly trying to
>come to a business decision by various means, including
rock-paper-scissors, as a large BFC building rises out of clouds of
>dust behind them all.

>Still unconcerned, Kasumi changes into Natsumi and uses her powers to
sweep the whole mess away at an incredible rate, leaving a white
>screen for the title logo to fade into.)

> Richard Beaubien
 presents
> Natsumi, the Magical Girl
 Chapter 5: Idol Scramble!
> ...or An Idol a Day Keeps the Youma Away
 (embellished by Mike K.)
> -----

> Now why can't *I* live in a place like this?

> Yukie had always been envious of people who could afford to live
in large homes, like the Tendo Dojo; on her meager salaries, she
>could only maintain an apartment life. What she could see of the
Tendo grounds from the only opening in the gate set her to wishing
>once more. Ah, this place was a dream, compared to her tiny
apartment! It would be a lot of fun to live in a house like this...
>
 Still, she knew she couldn't spend the entire day daydreaming at
>the outer gate - she had business to attend to here. Besides which,
she figured she'd get a much better view of everything if she was
>inside than on the outside looking in. Yukie gathered her courage,
taking a second to make sure she was presentable and brushing the
>strands of short red hair away from her face, and proceeded to open
the gate.
>
 She took care to announce her presence. Who knew if the Tendos

>took kindly to unannounced guests? "Hello..."

> The front door opened as she approached, revealing the smiling
face of a young woman with long brown hair. "Ah, a guest. Welcome!
>How can I help--"

> Kasumi's words came to a dead stop in her throat as she
recognized who it was she was in the process of greeting.

>
 Yukie hadn't noticed the slip. She uttered a small, coy giggle

>at the greeting and proceeded to introduce herself. "Good afternoon.
My name is Saori Yukie, and I would like to speak to Tendo Nabiki, if
>I could."

> ****

> Nabiki peered into the kitchen in time to see an extremely
nervous Kasumi pacing back and forth. She hadn't seen her big sister
>like this since... since... hmm. What could be troubling her so?

> "Kasumi?" she asked. "What's wrong? You look...
uncharacteristically stressed out."

>
 "It's her."
>
 "Who? Oh, you mean Yukie? What about her?"
>
 "Nabiki!" admonished Kasumi. "You know we've met her
>before! She saw me as Natsumi and--"

> "And we don't know why she's here, so why don't we ask
her
before we assume the worst?" Nabiki interrupted, deciding to
leave
>the kitchen before her own suspicions began to show. Kasumi
was
anxious enough as it was. Had Yukie seen through Natsumi's
disguise
>and figured out who Natsumi really was? Well... it shouldn't take
a
rocket scientist, Nabiki frowned. Those magical girl costumes
never
>really did much to hide the wearer's identity - although the
people
around them never seemed to notice that so-and-so just
happens to
>look exactly like the hero they're so much in awe of...

> Nabiki knew her older sister was taking a little longer
putting
together a light snack and some tea. Probably thinking
about the
>implications of having her secret identity revealed to the public
at
large. While that *would* open up new business and marketing

>opportunities, their family would immediately become a target of
the
BFC and maybe any other monsters out there that thought they
needed
>to make a name for themselves. And Daddy? He'd lose it if he
found
out what Kasumi was doing... but then, he lost it quite
frequently,
>and very easily at that.

> She wondered what it was Dad had lost, exactly,
laughing
inwardly at her little joke.
>
 Oh... and they couldn't forget Happosai, either. The little

>lech left Kasumi alone now, but if he found out she was going
around
in that short-skirted costume...
>
 Kasumi passed Nabiki in the hallway. Nabiki guessed she had

>been right on nearly all counts - she could see the strain
starting
to appear on Kasumi's face. And that wasn't a good sign.

>
 Yukie looked up from the table as the two sisters entered the

>room. "I'm sorry if you had to wait a while, Saori-san. I hope
you
like it."
>
 Yukie didn't mind; it wasn't often she had conveniences like

>this at her own apartment. Her co-stars faced similar problems.
And
besides, the snacks and tea Kasumi had prepared looked so
good...
>"Thank you. I'm sure they're wonderful." She continued to
glance
with curiosity around at her surroundings. Were all houses
this
>spacious? Or was there more money to be made in teaching
martial
arts than acting? "I have to admit, you certainly have a
nice house."
>
 Nabiki gave a barely audible snort. "Well, we try to keep it

>well-maintained..." she said dryly. Enough pleasantries... time
to
find out why this young woman had come to see her. "I suppose

we

>really should talk about why you've come, though."

> "Hai..." Yukie seemed a bit pained. She rummaged through her
bag for a piece of paper, which had survived its stay in the bag

>rather well. "I would like to sign up to be trained as a martial
artist."

>
 Nabiki took the paper and scanned it. Only one item was of

>immediate concern to her: how much the... er, student... was willing
to fund his or her education. Around here, that said a lot. Yukie

>was willing to pay more than the standard rate, too, more than what
they usually made now.

>
 The thing was, business was rather slow. Oh, sure, the dojo

>attracted a *lot* of competent martial artists on a daily basis - but
these weren't paying customers.

>
 Kasumi offered to pour Yukie another cup of tea. "You don't

>strike me as the type of person with the drive to go out there and
really learn the martial arts," Nabiki said. She'd rehearsed it well

>enough to say it without breaking up.

> Yukie came to attention. "But, I am! Really!" Uh-oh... can't
let Nabiki see how much she wanted to do this. Nabiki acted like

>another one of those world-class manipulators she was always hearing
about... "Well. Um, our studio's cut the budget for our show -

>perhaps you've heard of it? 'Mystical Fighters Sany?'"

> Nabiki nodded. She knew the show all too well...

> "Anyway, the cuts meant we had to let go of our stunt doubles,
so we have to do all our own stunts now."

>
 "But why here?" asked Nabiki, more intent on Yukie's true

>motives. "Why not pick another dojo, say, closer to the studio or
where you live? I know of at least two other schools that would--"

>
 That was when Yukie broke down. "Because you were so nice and

>helped me out when we were attacked by those scary monsters at the
Toy Fair!" Yukie blurted, trying to hold back the tears. She didn't

>want the memories of her 'teammates' trying to kill her to resurface.
"So... I thought I'd repay you by coming here to train. It's the

>least I can do."

> Nabiki was about to interrogate her guest further when the
familiar sound of running tears interrupted her train of thought.

>"Miss, did I hear you correctly? Do you really wish to train here,
with us?"

>
 Leave it to Daddy to ruin a perfectly good interrogation.

>
 He was still crying buckets of water. Nabiki often wondered if

>he didn't just absorb most of that water from all those baths he and
Uncle Saotome always took. Hot, running water cost money...

>
 "Yes! Absolutely! I really do want to train here, honest!"

>Could Yukie be any *less* enthusiastic?

> Soun slapped the shoulder of their new student, who gave him a
rather awkward look in return - once she'd pulled herself back to an

>upright position. "Do you hear that, Saotome? We have a new
student!" he beamed.

>
 Yukie wondered if she was making a big mistake. Certainly, she

>didn't *really* need to become a certified martial artist to play her
part on the show; who said reality and the 'Mystical Fighters Sany'

>could mix? She did want to repay Nabiki, however, and it wouldn't
hurt to learn martial arts... although with this group of people, she

>wasn't entirely certain any longer.

> "Was there ever a reason to doubt? We are, after all,
high-caliber martial artists! It's a wonder people aren't breaking

>down our doors to come train with us!" boasted Genma, with the
obligatory muscle flexes.

>
 Breaking down doors was one thing to come to them was one thing,

>Nabiki knew. Or walls. But to come train with them? Well...

She
hoped Daddy and Uncle Saotome could only keep that amazing bravado

>after Happosai returned from whatever it was he was up to this week.

After all, it wasn't good for business to have students see their

>teachers cower in front of an incurable old pervert.

> "Well, then, let's take you on a tour of the grounds," Soun and
Genma proceeded to take Yukie away, regaling her with stories of

>their supposed skills and some of the things they could teach Yukie.

All Yukie could manage was a worried glance back at Nabiki and Kasumi

>before leaving, almost as if to say, "Help..." Nabiki didn't blame
her one bit.

>
 "I don't think we have to worry about your secret, at least for

>the moment," Nabiki told Kasumi.

> "You don't understand," Kasumi replied, tense. "That's not what
I'm worried about."

>

>
 Little did anyone know that at that very moment, the monster

>that had staged the attack on Tomizawa Ami earlier was presently
seated behind a desk in an upscale office in Tokyo, reading the

>latest rejection letter. He let out a quiet sigh. If only he'd been
able to obtain all of the energy he'd needed through using Tomizawa,

>he could have moved on to stage two of the grand plan. But thanks to
a hero wanna-be, the plan would have to be delayed a little longer

>while he searched for another cute, young, innocent idol to steal
energy from... perhaps a lesser-known target?

>
 Sakurano Mika, his latest charge. He planned to use an idol

>singer to help control the world, gathering the energy
those
ridiculous Humans expended at concerts and what-not,
cheering for
>their idols... But there was one glaring fault with the plan.

> His current idol singer nominee. "Another rejection letter?"

Mika asked, having poked her head into the doorway before he
could
>crumple the letter and toss it into the wastebasket. "Don't worry.

I'm sure we'll have that contract real soon. You'll see! Bye!"

>
 After Mika left, he sighed again. Sure, Sakurano was cute - one

>of the cutest girls out there. But... she had absolutely no
talent
for singing whatsoever. That did tend to put a small crimp
in the

>part of the plan that required using an idol as a trigger
for
gathering immense amounts of energy plan. And the
dominate-the-world
>plan.

> That would soon change. As soon as...
 He sifted through the
stack of eight-by-ten glossies on his
>desk. Ah! There was one...

> ...As soon as he paid a visit to this young candidate:
Saori
Yukie. Yes, soon he'd have control over the entire world.
The

>entire mortal plane. It was definitely time for another
usual
evil-overlord laugh.....

>
 It was the janitor's turn to sigh. "Again with the laughing."

>Muttering, the janitor began to vacuum the floor, leaving a
somewhat
embarrassed monster behind the desk. "Move your feet. I
can't

>vacuum with you in the way!"

> The monster did so. He decided to wait until the janitor left
to
pick up where he'd left off, this time within the silence of his

>mind.

> ****

> Yes, he was hopelessly lost again.
 Or was he?

> Why bother asking?

> Unless the Tendos had a yard bordering on an amusement park,
he
was in the wrong place. That went without saying. Somehow,
Ryouga

>could wind up hundreds of miles off course in the mere time span
of
one day. One day... So where did that leave him now?

>
 No matter; he had to make his way back to Akane-san and save
her

>from her suffering alongside Ranma.

> Directions. He needed to know where he was supposed to go
in
order to get there.

>
 Since he was standing a few feet from the front door of the
yard

>he was standing in, he walked up to the door and knocked on it.

A
young man opened the door, somewhat briskly. "Yes? What do you

>want?"

> Ryouga cleared his throat. "Could you tell me how to get
to
Tokyo, please? I'm looking for the Tendo dojo..."

>
 The young man studied him for a few seconds. "Just a minute,"

>he said, closing the door again.

> Ryouga's ability to sense danger flared up again. He prepared
for an attack. Who'd want to attack me here?
>
 "Hold it RIGHT there, enemy of the Tomizawa Fan Club!!!" came a

>voice from behind him. The next thing he knew, there was a hydraulic
platform rising up in place of the lawn behind him, carrying over one
>hundred well-armed and crisply-uniformed soldiers. "In the name of
Tomizawa Ami, we will punish you!"
>
 Ryouga had a strained look on his face. "What did I do to you?"

>
 "ATTACK, FOR THE SAKE OF OUR LOVELY AMI-CHAN!!!" And so they

>did, swarming off the platform toward him.

> Why were they after him? He couldn't see the reasoning behind
the attack. He, on the other hand, always had a perfectly logical
>reason for whatever he did, and could explain everything.
 Or so he thought.
>
 "You'd better stop before someone gets hurt..." he called. If

>they were seriously intent on fighting him, he had no choice but to
oblige - although he didn't know why they were so upset with him.
>But anyone who dared attack Hibiki Ryouga was in for the fight of
their lives.
>
 "YOU ARE THE ONE WHO WILL BE HURT, MORTAL ENEMY, WHEN YOU MEET

>YOUR DOOM!" the soldiers yelled in a blood frenzy, leaving Ryouga
wondering why they still wouldn't listen to reason. Oh, well.
>
 "SHI SHI HOUKOUDAN!!!!!!!!!"
>

>
 Three days had passed in Yukie's training.
>
 It had all looked so easy, innocently enough, just a few warm-up
>exercises, controlled breathing and focusing, and anyone could break
cinder blocks or perform stunts like actor Jackie Chan did in his
>films. But as time went on, Yukie was discovering that martial-arts
wasn't necessarily breaking bricks or using shopping carts as a
>lethal weapon.

> No, there was a lot of work involved here. Even a simple thrust
or sweep required the proper form and concentration. She found out
>that after spending two hours running through a strenuous workout, it
became harder and harder to concentrate.
>
 Finally, she'd had enough, collapsing onto the floor. "Water...

>could I please have some water..."

> Genuinely worried, Kasumi poured Yukie a glass of water, which
the girl gratefully accepted. "Are you all right?" she asked, as
>Yukie drank the water almost in one turn.

> "I'm all right, I think. I just need a break."

> "Well..." Nabiki approached them. "I think you've had enough
for today. Maybe Kasumi can walk you home..." she suggested, handing

>Kasumi a list. "Oh, Daddy wanted you to get these things from the
market."
>
 "I thought Akane already had everything she needed to make

>dinner tonight?"

> Nabiki made a face. "It's not *Akane* he's worried about."

> Kasumi knew better. Why couldn't anyone in this household
appreciate Akane-chan's cooking? Akane was still learning, and
>needed all the support she could get. Why, when Kasumi was growing
up, Mother had given her all the support she could...
> Mother.....

> Yukie's boundless enthusiasm had returned. "Thank you, Nabiki,
Kasumi! I'll be waiting outside, okay?" Nabiki watched her leave,
>taking care not to voice her nervousness.

> "I'll be right out," Kasumi said, glancing at Nabiki.

> Nabiki grinned. "Don't forget the onions, oneechan. I have a
feeling we're going to need them."
>

>
 Kasumi memorized the list as she walked alongside Yukie. There

>was a note scribbled at the very bottom of the list - Nabiki wanted
Kasumi to prod Yukie for a few more answers, and she figured Kasumi
>would have no problem in asking for them. Interrogation wasn't
exactly Kasumi's strong point, but Yukie seemed very open with her
>and willing to answer most of the questions Kasumi could put to her,
which Nabiki obviously took to mean that Kasumi was the obvious
>choice to get Yukie to talk. Why did Nabiki have to be so serious
all the time, hiding herself behind a protective shell?

>
 Time to break the silence. "So..... how are you enjoying the

>lessons so far?"

> "They're a lot harder than I thought they might be," Yukie
admitted in a weary voice. "But I'm not gonna give up. If I work
>hard, maybe I'll be able to pull off some impressive stunts for the
show, like all those martial artists they always have in the animated
>shows... You know, all those super-human kicks and stuff!" Which she
proceeded to demonstrate with enthusiasm, only to end up landing on
>her rear. She pulled herself up with a nervous laugh. "Looks like I
still need some practice."
>
 Kasumi smiled. "Oh, I think you'll do all right. Most of the

>martial artists we've trained in the dojo don't turn into superhuman
warriors in their first few days of training."
>
 "Thanks." Kasumi's suspicions about Yukie were slowly but

>surely wearing away; she couldn't help but like the girl. "But...
that isn't exactly why I'm doing this."
> Kasumi paused. "Why are you doing this, then?"

> Yukie stopped as well. "I'm not really doing this for the show
or maybe Nabiki; I'm not sure if I'd go through with it if

that were

>the case. I'm doing this because of you."

> "Me?" said Kasumi with a start.

> "Sort of. You... you remind me of someone I know."

> Oh, my... Did Yukie know the truth about her secret identity?

If so, then she could very well be at risk... and so, too, would

>Yukie be... from any monster that wanted to make a name by
rubbing
out any magical girls that just happened to be in the
area.

>
 "That's my apartment over there," Yukie interrupted her

>thoughts, pointing toward one of the smaller apartment houses.

"Hey..." she had a sudden thought. "Would you like to come in for
a

>little tea?"

> "Well... I don't really have the time." Kasumi noticed she
still
held the list tightly within her left hand. "I really should

>be going to the marketplace."

> "Please, oneechan? I feel I owe you the favor," pleaded

Yukie,
using the full power of the Saori Yukie Sad Puppy-Dog Eyes
Technique

>(patent-pending) to try to convince Kasumi to join her for tea.

> How could she say no to such effort? "All right, but only
one
cup... I really must be going soon."

>
 "Yippee!!" Yukie exclaimed cheerfully, escorting Kasumi into

>the apartment.

> Oh, well. At least I might have a chance to determine
exactly
what she does and doesn't know about me.

>

>
 Yukie's apartment was a small but cozy place, well-decorated

>with the limited furniture choices she had to work with.

Flower
arrangements covered up some of the more sparsely-decorated
parts of

>the rooms, and framed posters that looked like promotional posters
for
an idol singer were hanging here and there on the walls.

>
 It was the latter that caught Kasumi's eye. She could have

>sworn that the idol in the posters was Yukie, yet the idol had
longer
hair and a different name...

>
 Yukie returned with the tea, placing a cup before Kasumi.

>"Here's the tea I promised, oneechan. So how do you like the
place?"

> "It's nice," Kasumi sipped at her tea, trying to determine
what
to say. "I like the flowers. Oh, and those posters... Is that
you

>in those posters? She looks a lot like you..."

> "Yes. It's me," Yukie said, drawing a puzzled look from

Kasumi.
"I've also been an idol singer, since a few years back. I
guess I

>did okay, too, except after a year or so I went on to do the show
and
some small parts as voices for animated shows..."

>
 "Oh." Kasumi managed, feeling sympathetic.

>
 Yukie laughed bemusedly. "It's not that bad, really. The work

>was a pain, but I managed to save quite a bit of money, and I met
some nice friends, including someone that you remind me of..."

>
 Kasumi could see she was trying to hold back a few tears. "She

>worked as a junior exec and part-time roadie with the record company
I was signed with, and we became friends. She was nice and kind like

>you are, and we occasionally had lots of fun on the road."

Yukie
gazed at her concert poster before continuing. "After I lost my

>popularity standing, we were still friends. But I lost contact with
her when a big company bought the record firm and she was promoted.

>I still wonder where she went to..."

> "I'm sorry."

> "Oh, it's all right." Yukie put on a cheerful act, wiping the
tears away. "I've made some new friends like you and Hitomi. I do

>still miss her, but I still have many good friends to come to."

> Kasumi looked at Yukie in a different light. All of the
suspensions she'd had about the actor had been dissolved away.

>Sitting before her was a girl who wanted to be friends, not look for
the true identity of a magical girl. Kasumi knew she wouldn't have a

>problem being a friend for her. "Oh, dear," she checked the time,
"I really must be going. I've got to go to the marketplace and then

>help Akane with dinner."

> She stood. Yukie seemed disappointed. "Well, if you must..."

> "I'll see you the next time you come over for practice, okay?"
"Sure! Thanks for coming over, oneechan."

> "Thank you for inviting me."

> Yukie carefully shut the door once Kasumi left, a huge smile on
her face. She really liked Kasumi, and couldn't wait until her next

>lesson. Of course, that meant more working out, which wasn't much of
a confidence booster in her humble opinion...

>
 "Ah, she's finally gone. I was wondering when she would leave."

>
 The voice was one Yukie didn't recognize. "Who's there?" she

>demanded, taking up a defensive stance she'd happened to learn in the
day's lesson - and grabbing a nearby frying pan to add weight to her

>words. Good thing, too, because the newcomer apparently decided to
keep his distance as a result, hiding in shadows Yukie hadn't even

>realized were there. "Who are you, what do you want and what in the
world are you doing in my apartment!?"

>
 "Only an agent who wants to help you revive your career as an

>idol once more," the monster laughed, stepping out of the shadows so
that Yukie could see his form. In terror, Yukie screamed, dropping

>the frying pan. "Yes... soon you'll be the next big idol
phenomenon..."

>

>
 Kasumi found a broad smile had made its way onto her face as she
>waited for traffic to clear at the street corner. She liked Yukie;
the girl had made a good impression on her, and she was glad she
>didn't have to report anything negative to Nabiki. Now, if only she
could keep Yukie from getting caught up in any further magical girl
>mayhem...

> "SOMEBODY HELP ME!!!"

> Kasumi recognized the voice. That's Yukie! She dashed back
into the building, up the flight of steps and screeched to a halt in

>front of Yukie's door. It was unlocked.

> Just short of the foyer was a monster, trying to take control
over Yukie's mind the hard way. It had her head grasped within the
>palm of one glowing hand. "A youma!" Kasumi exclaimed.
 Oh, no - should she have said that aloud?
>
 "I prefer the term 'Daimon,' actually. I heard it on a TV show

>somewhere and I thought I could put it to better use." The monster
- er, *daimon* - laughed, tossing Yukie aside for the moment. "Do
>you want to be the first person to truly test that theory?"

> "Which theory is that?" Kasumi asked, hoping to buy some time
for Yukie to recover and escape. And, for her to break away and find
>some secluded spot to transform. She was becoming very aware of the
brooch pinned above her chest. The longer she waited, the heavier
>the brooch felt. But she couldn't reveal her secret in front of
Yukie...
>
 "Why, the theory that music is one of the most powerful weapons

>in the world, of course!" A swirl of cherry blossom petals -
human-sized - appeared next to the daimon. A girl - Mika - appeared
>within... Kasumi recognized the vacant look in Mika's eyes. This
girl was under the daimon's control! The daimon fed Mika a quick
>burst of idol power. "Sing, Mika! Sing, and overtake her mind!"

> Kasumi knew she no longer had a choice. She had to transform.

"Love--" she raised her hand. But that was when Mika started to sing.
>
 Mika's dark song worked its way through her defenses and caught

>her mind in its grasp. It had her... Absently, she dropped the
brooch and proceeded to bow before her new master...
>
 The daimon laughed as he looked into Kasumi's vacant eyes. His

>plan had actually worked! So much for all those idiot colleagues of
his who thought he'd watched a little too much anime when he told
>them of the plan. This would show them... And soon, he'd have
control over the entire Zen - no, the entire mortal plane. He

>allowed himself to break into yet another stereotypically

evil,
demented laugh...

>
 The laugh nudged Yukie out of unconsciousness, in time to see

>Kasumi kneeling down in front of the monster that had attacked her,
all signs of conscious personality gone from Kasumi's face. She

>realized to her horror what must have happened. "*ONEECHAN*!!!"

Yukie screamed, launching an impromptu suicide strike at the daimon -

>which he easily avoided.

> Yukie hit the ground hard. "Please, leave her alone. I don't
want to lose her... like..." she pleaded.

>
 The monster seemed to turn sympathetic for a fleeting second.

>"Oh - don't worry, I'm not hurting her... in fact, you can join her.

Listen to the music and you'll find out how..." In her weakened

>state, Yukie almost couldn't help but listen to the melody... give in
to the hypnotic allure of the song... lose herself in the rhythm...

>If only she could reach the CD player before... before.....

> There!

> "WHAT!?" the daimon exclaimed. Yukie had succeeded; the music
of some of the latest top idols drowned out Mika's dark song. "NO!!"

>shrieked the daimon, preparing to strike Yukie for what she had
done, and completely forgetting about...

>
 Kasumi. "LOVE POWER... TRANSFORM!"

>
 By the time the daimon heard the words, he was already halfway

>into his assault on Yukie. Yukie, instead, was watching Kasumi in
shock. "Kasumi-oneechan is.....?"

>
 Before the daimon could connect with his final strike, Natsumi

>grabbed his hand out of the air and levered him into the ground
before he could complete his strike.

>
 "WHO ARE YOU?" the daimon demanded, recovering from the throw.

>
 "Music is very powerful, indeed. But it isn't meant to be used

>as a weapon to control the minds of others." Natsumi paused to point
an accusing finger at the monster. "In the name of love and justice,

>I, Natsumi, the magical girl, will punish you for your crimes."

> Oh, geez... "Really? Well, take THIS instead!"

> Natsumi dodged the short pulse of idol energy the monster loosed
at her, and moved in close to strike the daimon in the gut. She made

>her move. "This is for Yukie-chan!" she announced. "LOVE POWER
STRIKE!!!" Her fist disappeared into an aura of bright green energy,

>striking the would-be evil agent and turning him into nothing more
than a pile of black dust.

>
 Mika, no longer under the evil spell, slumped to the ground,

>unconscious.

> As Natsumi turned around to check on Yukie, she was met halfway
by Yukie instead, who immediately gave Natsumi a great big hug,

>crying "Oneechan!"

> Natsumi awkwardly stood there for a few more seconds
before
returning the embrace.
>

>
 Two days later, the spring cleaning officially began. Yukie

>sighed; the fight had left the main room of her apartment in a bit
of
a mess. It was a good thing she hadn't been evicted, either.

>
 Oh, well - a fights with monsters generally didn't do much for

>the interior decor of an apartment, anyway, and the place could
have
used a bit of redecorating. With Kasumi-oneechan helping as
well,
>she had finally convinced herself to get around to doing it.

> "It's nothing," Kasumi said. "Though Nabiki insisted on
paying
for the general repairs. She said she'll be sending you a
bill soon,
>but don't worry... if she does, I'll pay for it."

> "Really?" Yukie asked. "But what about you-know-who?"

> "Don't worry about it." Kasumi laughed. "It's all right.

Besides, Nabiki said we could use an idol singer on the marketing

>team."

> Yukie's face lit up. "I'll help any way I can," she promised.

After all, Kasumi had saved her life again. Kasumi-oneechan, her

>friend...

> ****

> (...epilogue...)

> How in the world did I wind up here?

> The warehouse was a rather dismal place, especially when
Ryouga
compared it to the location he had fully intended to wind
up at - the
>Tendo Dojo. Contributing to the beauty of the Tendo's residence
was
Akane's endless beauty, of course.
>
 This place, on the other hand, had no such charms. It looked

>more like a landfill to him than a place someone would pick for
a
home.
>
 Then again, he didn't have to put up with the crazed Tomizawa

>Ami fan attacks he'd been enduring for the past few days. What
had
he done to the singer to warrant all this? Still, people
seemed to
>imply he'd done something completely unforgivable to her.
Why
wouldn't they stop and listen to his side of the story for
once?
>
 While Ryouga was thinking, two large robot-mechs decided to pop

>up in front of him. How had they gotten there without him noticing?

Both mechs were almost humanoid, painted in police-issue standard

>colors. "Captain... what's this living person doing in the middle
of
the target range?" one of the mechs boomed, impressing Ryouga
even
>though he didn't care much for heavy machinery.
 Ryouga abruptly
realized there was a uniformed man standing next
>to him, smoking a cigarette. "Excuse me, but would you mind
telling
me what you're doing here?"

>
 "I'm looking for the Tendo Dojo," he admitted, uneasily. "If
>you could tell me where it is, I'll be on my way."
 The man shook
his head.
>
 "Aren't you police officers? Maybe you could help me with a
>slight problem I've been having."

> "Maybe. But this is highly irregular. We usually don't
have
people come down here to ask us for help."
>
 "It's an unusual case," Ryouga said. He usually didn't feel the
>need to ask others for help, but in this case... "I've got this
giant
mob of crazed Tomizawa Ami fans out to get me because they
think I've
>done something to her, and I haven't! And they won't listen
to
reason, either!"
>
 "It IS you!!" one of the mechs drew its gun. "You're the one
>that stands in between us and our precious Ami-chan! Isao Ohta
will
punish you in the name of the Tomizawa Fan Club!!!"
>
 Ryouga hadn't expected to have to fight either of the mechs -
>Ingrams, from the conversation he'd picked up. Thankfully, the
other
mech was attempting to hold the deviant Ingram back. He'd
hate to
>have to take out an obviously expensive piece of police
machinery...

> The Ingram broke free and began to attack Ryouga.

> On the sidelines, Captain Goto merely shook his head,
wondering
how he'd fill out the report on this incident. The chief
wouldn't
>accept the fact that an insane idol fan among the officers was
using
an Ingram to fight a boy who claimed to be an innocent,
would he?
>He smirked, trying to figure out an easy way to avoid having
the
image of the SV2 tarnished again...
>
 (The end. Or is it?)
>

> <p><p>

6. Epsiode 6 - The Tournament, The Party, a...

>From makoto@mother.com Sat Jul 24 21:02:15 1999
Date: Thu, 11 Mar
1999 23:15:05 GMT
>From: Mike Koos makoto@mother.com
To:
beaubird@anime.usacomputers.net
>Subject: Natsumi 6 - 50 percent complete

> The light from the morning sun slowly spilled through the
window
blinds of the only window in the small room. There wasn't
much in the
>way of furniture or decorations to differentiate the room from a
room
at the local hotel - a cheap particle-board desk crammed into
one
>corner, a withering plant occupying the corner diagonally opposite
the
desk, with a bed and a non-matching night stand placed
haphazardly in
>the middle of it all. Whoever had designed the layout of this
room
had *not* been an interior decorator. That much was for sure.

> In fact, this was a guest room, but as far as the
'guest'
sleeping - or *trying* to sleep - on the bed was
concerned, it may
>well have been a hotel room.
 The middle-aged woman draped across
the bed groaned loudly.
>Sunlight was everywhere... attempting to pry her eyes open, but
she
wanted no part of it. Waking up meant coming to terms with
what she
>had done, and she didn't want to have to do that for another
millennium
or two. Maybe five, if at all.
> Still, her body seemed not to realize she didn't want it
to
awaken. What she could see of the room through her hazy eyes
wasn't
>of much encouragement. "Ugh..."
 "That must've been some party
last night," another voice
>remarked, and even in her state she could recognize the sarcasm
there.
"I didn't know youma could get drunk. Or have hangovers."

> "Oh, you'd better believe they can," Mine rasped. The
expected
migraine headache rotated into its proper place as she
made a
>miserable attempt to sit up. Where were those memories of what
had
happened the previous night?
> ...No, that was the headache, not a memory. Some of her
memories
suddenly decided to fall back into place, separated by
considerable
>gaps which the migraine filled quite nicely. Uchida Mine wasn't
sure
she *wanted* to remember exactly what she was currently
forgetting,
>either. What she did know, was what she wanted to do with her
new
friend, the pounding migraine, which gained strength every
moment she
>remained conscious. There was only one thing she could think of
to
counteract this wonderful hangover... "...coffee... I need
some.
>Coffee."
 "But, are you sure that's wise, Mine-san?" the voice
asked her.
> "Coffee...", she repeated. Nothing else would do.
 "Fine. I'll
get you some coffee. But you're not going to like
>it," Ukyou smirked, intentionally slamming the door behind her as
she
left the room. Mine winced on hearing the sound; sheesh, was
that
>Kuonji Ukyou a demon... Inwardly, she smiled, which caused her
another
twinge of pain.
> And a minute later, Ukyou threw the door open again, letting
the
door slam against the wall. Let me rephrase that. It hadn't
taken
>Ukyou long at all to return with some coffee. What, had she
been
expecting this? "Did you HAVE to do that?" Mine growled,
holding her
>temples tightly.
 "Gomen," Ukyou laughed in a tone that told Mine
she really wasn't
>sorry for having tortured her. "Here's some instant coffee,
but
it's--"
> "I don't care!" Mine muttered as she snatched the cup of
dark
brown liquid away from Ukyou and poured every last drop into
her
>mouth, intending to swallow it in one gulp... only to spit it out
an
instant later. Well, in that regard, it really *was* instant

coffee.

>"Ack... bleah... I think I'm going to be deathly ill. What the hell
was that stuff!?"

> "Instant decaf," Ukyou told her, ignoring the glares of malice
Mine was sending her way. "I *tried* to warn you, didn't I?"

> "I need real coffee. Soon."
 "Oh, what the heck... I'm all out, but I'll get you some from the

>7-11 down the road if you want."
 "Yes, I want. *Real* coffee, remember. Lots of caffeine, and

>nothing but caffeine." She emphasized the latter point. "In fact, if
you can get a major overdose of caffeine WITHOUT the coffee, bring it

>here and we'll see how well that works."
 "Yeah, yeah. I'll say it again: that must've been some party

>last night."
 [Editors' note: Please, whatever you do, don't ask or e-mail us

>asking for details about the party, because none of our staff was
invited. Some of the crew is really ticked off about this, as we're

>told it was one hell of a party. So now, all we can do is allow the
vague references to it, and hope someone else mentions more about the

>party after a while.]
 Ukyou slammed the door behind her on her way out, this time

>unintentionally. The sound detonated inside her head with more force
than any attack any of the youma she knew could muster. Lacking the

>concentration to dedicate to grace, Mine flopped backward onto the
bed, losing herself in her thoughts and her headache.

> Odd, she thought; wasn't there something else to this hangover
business than just devastating headaches? Her last hangover had been

>a long, long time ago, but she had a vague notion that there
definitely was something else about to hit her.

> Ah, there it was. She felt the sudden need to run to the
bathroom, wherever *that* was...

>
 [OP: "The Girl is Magic" (Natsumi Title Theme)/Inoue Kikuko]

>
(OP sequence: An unconcerned Kasumi stands in the main walkway of the

>Tendo yard, sweeping. Soon, Ranma and Akane appear, fighting.

Then
Ryouga, Shampoo and Ukyou join the fray. Genma appears, but Ranma

>throws him into the pond. Soun sits off to one side, crying.

Akane
slam-dunks Ranma into the pond, and the panda raises a sign that says,

>"What kept you?" Ranma takes a swipe at him with the

sign.
Finally, Nabiki and Mine appear in the background, seemingly trying to

>come to a business decision by various means,

including
rock-paper-scissors, as a large BFC building rises out of clouds of

>dust behind them all.

>Still unconcerned, Kasumi changes into Natsumi and uses her powers to
sweep the whole mess away at an incredible rate, leaving a white

>screen for the title logo to fade into.)

> Richard Beaubien
 presents

> Natsumi, the Magical Girl
 Chapter 6: The Tournament, the Party,

and the Hangover...

> (embellished by Makoto)

>
 Mine preoccupied herself for several minutes by debating the

>purpose of the existence of decaffeinated coffee. There was
no
logical point in having the stuff around, was there? The
whole

>point of drinking something like coffee was to get one's maximum
daily
requirement of caffeine in one dose, short of having
caffeine sent

>straight to the system via an IV drip.

> The word 'drip' sent her on a short daydream that had quite a
bit
to do with free association.

>
 Instant Decaf, therefore, must have been an instrument of
torture

>devised by someone far more evil than she, to keep millions
of
unsuspecting people from learning the true powers of a good cup
of

>coffee. Not to mention the benefits...

> No other drink meant as much to Mine at the moment; no
fruit
juice or milk could take the place of coffee, no matter how
hard they

>tried. There was, on the other hand, a separate drink she
wouldn't
have minded having right about now...

>
 A bottle of sake rested on the night stand. It was the same
drink

>that had led to her waking up mere minutes ago with the
impression
that she'd managed to swallow an active jackhammer at
some point

>during the night. She couldn't remember much, and the image did fit
the pain
she was feeling in her head nicely.

>
 So, why not have some more sake? she wondered. What better way

>to numb the pain? Even coffee couldn't get rid of a migraine as
fast
as alcohol. So what if she'd only wake up a little later with
the

>exact same problems? Surely, a little drink then would do
wonders
with the headache as well.

>
 Who was she to argue with logic like that?

>
 She stumbled out of the bed and dragged herself all the way

>around it to get to the night stand. Once she reached it, she
realized
how much easier it would have been had she remained in
the bed and

>simply rolled the other way.

> As she reached out to grasp the bottle, it was violently
knocked
away from her, shattering against the wall. Mine's eyes
went from the

>clear liquid pooling on the floor to the thin spatula imbedded in
the
wall above. She fell to her knees. "Why did you have to do
that? It

>was defenseless. It wouldn't have hurt any of us."

> Ukyou shook her head. "You're more out of it than I
thought.
Come on; we need you one hundred percent sober by this
afternoon.

>Remember? It's the day of the tournament."

> If I can't have sake, I might as well have-- "Coffee," her
mouth
formed the word again.

>
 Ukyou exhaled. "I bought you a large coffee - plain, no sugar -

>and a six-pack of this canned stuff the clerk said was called
'Jolt.'
>They supposedly import it for the college students, I
think. It's
>supposed to have *twice* the caffeine of any other soft drink on
the
>market."
>
 Mine accepted the coffee and the cans of Jolt. An idea came to

>her; she opened one of the cans and poured the soda into her
coffee.
Twice the caffeine, huh? Well, how much caffeine would
there be if
>she added it to her coffee?

> Not enough.

> Ukyou winced at the sight of Mine taking another sip of
her
newfound mixture. "You *are* going to be okay in time for the

>tournament, aren't you?"

> "I guess. Oww... Not bad, but still not strong enough.
This
stuff... you want some, Ukyou?"
>
 The other paled. "Uh... no thanks. Anyway, about that

>tournament..."

> Mine laughed, this time gulping down nearly a quarter of
her
coffee concoction. "Lighten up, would you? You can handle all
of the
>stuff that's scheduled for this morning. I should be around by
the
middle of the day to help. I just need to take a long nap,
first."
>
 "But what if something goes wrong?"
>
 "Then just look in the youma handbook under 'Generic Traps and

>Counter-attacks.'"

> Ukyou frowned. "I've already read some of that section. It's
a
few hundred pages long!"
>
 "Yeah, well, there's a lot to be said for predictability." With

>a loud thud, Mine collapsed onto the table and drifted away to a
short
rest in Dreamland. Ukyou had to sigh; Mine must've gotten
herself
>very drunk the night before. Where in the world had she gone?

> Unfortunately, those thoughts would have to be saved for
another
time. There was an evil plot to be executed, and like it
or not, she
>would have to oversee it all by herself. Oh, it had sounded simple
in
the beginning - when Mine had proposed it six days ago. But
then Mine
>had gone to her party, so now Ukyou was the one in charge of
this
snare. I guess it won't be too much of a difference, after
all, she
>thought, optimistically. She will be around later to back me
up...

> Ukyou glanced at Mine's sleeping form. "Right?"

> Nothing. Not that she'd expected an answer to begin with.

> Just to be on the safe side, she tried to make sure that each
and
every last drop of any kind of alcohol was absent from the
place
>before she left. Hopefully, Mine would be sober when she next
made
her appearance.
>

>
 Six days ago...

> [cue obligatory, generic flashback FX (we ARE on a budget, after
all)]

>
 "So, Tendo-san, we can count on your presence?"

> "Naturally. It would be my pleasure to have our representatives
participate in this tournament - to show everyone the pride and joy of our students."

> "Thank you, Tendo-san. Believe me, you won't be disappointed."

> The tears of joy - as if anyone could really tell! - flowing down
Soun's face glistened in the bright sunlight, each forming miniature rainbows of their very own in some obscure corner of his mustache.
Yes, this was a day to be proud... for his school was going to once again have a chance to show the entire whole of Japan just how special
his students were. And the fact that he'd been given this chance was all thanks to one special student whom had only recently come into his
tutelage.

>
 "Sensei? Sensei!" Yukie's voice shook Soun out of his thoughts.

>Even memories of this day's morning could be precious. "Is something
wrong?"

>
 "No, Yukie-kun. Nothing is wrong," Soun replied, tears continuing to stream entirely on reflex down his cheeks. Yukie took
the chance to cast a quick glance Nabiki's way; the middle Tendo sister simply shook her head and left the room, wondering how long it
would take Yukie, not to mention almost anyone, to become accustomed to her father's habit of being a little too emotional.

> Soun continued, unaware of the exchange. "In fact, this happens
to be a great day. We have been offered an invitation to participate in one of the Tokyo regional martial-arts competitions. Oh, if only
you understood what a true honor it is to play a part in these competitions..."

> Yukie, for her part, was confused. Her sensei meant well, but
there were times when he unwittingly condescended to people or - and this was far more likely - overreacted, to put it lightly. The man
seemed to have an endless supply of moisture to fuel his tears...

>Nabiki had once said that if they could figure out how to harness his
crying, there was a whole array of business opportunities they could take advantage of. Yukie was still trying to determine whether or not
that had been a joke; it was rather hard to tell with Nabiki, sometimes.

> "And you would be perfect for the competition! You would be in
the beginner's bracket, but I'm sure you'll do well." Soun paused.

>"...You will take part, won't you?"

> "Uh... Ano..." Yukie stalled, privately continuing to be amazed
that the man's waterfall of tears had no end in sight. What

about

>Ranma and Akane-chan? she wondered. Weren't they the stars of the
Tendo dojo? Had her sensei already asked them to participate, or had

>they already agreed? Neither of the pair seemed like the type to turn
down a martial-arts competition, especially Ranma. No, he was far too

>proud for that. So, chances were, he'd already agreed to go.

> Was Soun expecting her to refuse? While she didn't consider
herself to be up to competition standards, Yukie was confident enough

>that her abilities were up to par, even if she'd only been practicing
for a few weeks. And besides, her presence in the tournament might

>serve as an opportunity to promote her show.

> She smirked, though she wasn't completely aware of the
expression. Maybe she had been hanging around Nabiki-chan too long.

>
 "Sure. I'll do it, sensei!"

>
 That was when the tears flowed into overdrive. "Oh, thank you.

>Thank you, Yukie-kun! You honor this dojo with your enthusiasm!" he
practically gushed, for all intents and purposes, before leaving the

>room. "Saotome-kun! I have good news!"

> A bewildered Yukie stood in the middle of a considerable puddle
of saltwater wondering what in the world had just happened. Most of

>the time, her sensei certainly seemed rational enough. But there were
exceptions, like this, when happiness could mean a wet floor...

>
 "Sorry about that," Nabiki apologized, following Kasumi into the

>dojo. The elder sister carried a tray with a pitcher of lemonade and
three thin glasses. "That's just his way of communicating, you know.

>If he isn't crying, then something's probably up." She smirked.

> Yukie took the remark in stride. "Yeah, but... how can anyone
practice in all this water, Nabiki-oneechan?"

>
 Nabiki shrugged. "We manage. Oh, and please drop the

>'oneechan,' okay?"

> Kasumi offered the young martial artist a glass of lemonade.
"Still, it's kinda weird..." Yukie commented, taking a sip of the

>drink.

> "But not as weird as having our very own 'magical girl' around,
huh?"

>
 Yukie's eyebrows raised at the mention. She glanced at Kasumi,

>who appeared as though she was taken aback by Nabiki's words.

"Are
you all right, Kasumi-oneechan?"

>
 "I'm fine, Yukie-chan," Kasumi hemmed. "Why do you ask?"

>
 "Oh, don't worry about it," grinned Nabiki. On her, the

>expression gave her face a rather unnerving feel. "It isn't every day
we can get an adverse reaction out of Kasumi, here. Like it or not,

>big sister, you're now officially a part of all the weirdness
that
goes on around here!"
>
 Kasumi blinked. "I wouldn't say I'm weird, Nabiki. And neither

>is Natsumi."

> "So running around in a weird costume isn't strange?"

> A blush rose on Kasumi's cheeks. "Well... I didn't get to
choose
what I wear. Perhaps Mother did; I do not know." A short,
awkward
>pause passed before she added, "Being what I am isn't as weird as
the
other things that often happen in this area."
>
 "Other things?" Yukie asked, unsure what Kasumi was referring

>to.

> "Let's just say a *lot* of weird things happen here, and
more
often than not they relate somehow to the martial arts or to
Ranma,"
>Nabiki intervened before Kasumi could say anything. Despite
her
induction into the ranks of the magical girls, Kasumi was
still an
>innocent to most of the goings-on concerning most of the
inhabitants
of the Tendo residence.
>
 "But..."
>
 "And you know what that means, don't you?" Nabiki's grin had

>de-evolved back into a smirk. "You're going to be part of a
weird
martial-arts tournament!"
>
 Yukie paled slightly. Just how weird could a martial-arts

>tournament become? The only alternative form she was aware of
were
the 'forms' used in sentai shows and some animated series,
but those
>didn't count, right?

> Nabiki wasn't finished. "Hmm... wonder if it'll be
full-contact
shintaisou, or another variant on the tea ceremony...
Or maybe even
>full-contact flower arranging!"

> "Flower arranging!?" Yukie was thoroughly confused by
this
point. How could flower arranging, of all things, be
considered a
>martial art - and who would be weird enough to practice such a

fighting style? If Nabiki was at all right, the tournament just
might
>be extremely weird, at that.

> "Oh, and that's just the beginning! You could be facing
off
against someone on a giant okonomiyaki grill, or--"
>
 She never had the chance to finish, as Yukie ran out through
the
>doors in a panic. "Sensei! I'm having second thoughts
about
participating in this tournament...!"
>
 Noticing that Nabiki was laughing to herself at this, Kasumi

>turned a stern look on her. "Why did you torture her like
that,
Nabiki?" Nabiki had done that on a regular basis to Akane
during
>their childhood; it had served as the foundation for the person
Nabiki
presently was.
>
 "Oh, no reason." The smile with the hidden agenda was back.

>
 Kasumi sighed inwardly; Nabiki was being evasive again. It was

>difficult to get a clear answer out of the middle Tendo sister,
and
although Kasumi was the last person in the world Nabiki would
charge
>for anything, Nabiki still behaved toward her like she did anyone
and
everyone else. Okay, so maybe it was time to change the
subject.
>"So..." She paused, then began anew. "You honestly believe my
Natsumi
uniform is... weird, Nabiki?"
>
 Nabiki fidgeted. "Umm... well, kinda, I suppose. Actually, it

>looks nice and all, but..."

> "But what?"

> "It... you know, it... looks kinda like all those costumes
from
all those magical girl shows out there. Even the ones Yukie
wore.
>You remember..."

> "And what is wrong with that?"

> A faint smile took shape on Nabiki's face, bringing
an
uncomfortable sweatdrop to Kasumi's face. Nabiki had a plan,
and as
>everyone knew, this wasn't always good news to the ones she
happened
to involve in her plans. "You know, Kasumi... we could
always try to
>change your uniform. Maybe we can put together a better one!"

> Kasumi withdrew a step. "But, the costume I wear now is
magical;
it's given to me by... well, magical powers, I suppose.
How could
>anything *we* put together take its place?"

> But Nabiki wasn't about to be deterred. "I've got some
theories
on just that. And as for the costume, I have a few ideas
you might
>just like. We can have our own little Natsumi fashion show, just
you,
me, and maybe Yukie-chan. What do you say?"
>
 The nervous sweatdrop grew. "But, you never really answered my

>question..." Wait - this *was* Nabiki she was talking to,
correct?
Did she honestly believe Nabiki, of all people, would
give her a
>straight answer?

> Nabiki dodged the question, as was to be expected. "Ah,
don't
worry about it. You'd be surprised what a change in clothes
can do
>for our sales figures and toy line-up... after all, what use are
toys
without accessories? Sold separately, of course."
>
 Kasumi face-faulted. "Nabiki!" she admonished. Nabiki was only

>thinking of her pocketbook, again; her rationality and
sensibility
changed to that of a predatory animal whenever that
happened. Even
>if it meant catering to what the marketeers thought and not the
people
who were actually buying what Nabiki had to sell.
>
 Kasumi never had the chance to steer Nabiki back toward the
issue
>at hand, for a new rivulet of water made its way from the hall
into
the dojo. They could hear the cries... yes, their father was
crying
>once again. "Sounds like he's really sad, this time," Nabiki
exhaled.
"You want to take this one, should I, or should we both

do it?" She

>headed for the door, leaving Kasumi to stand, perplexed, as a new

puddle formed around her loafers.

>
 "I happen to like my current uniform," she said, though no one

>was currently present to hear her say it. She drifted toward
the
door, and followed the flow of water upstream to its source.

>
 Soun and Genma, as usual, were together. Kasumi wondered for a

>second if they were upset because Yukie had second thoughts
about
the tournament... but that couldn't be it.

>
 "Yukie-kun," Soun's voice, when it came, was strangely
reserved.

>"Would you mind accompanying my daughters on an errand?" he
murmured
in between sobs. "Nabiki - I want you to use this money;
the three of

>you can buy some ice cream, my treat. Okay?"

> Nabiki's grab-the-money-and-run reflex took over. "Okay,
Dad!"
She grabbed Yukie by the arm and proceeded to drag her
toward the open

>doorway where Kasumi stood. Best not to ask questions of their
father
at times like this. If it was truly important, he would
tell them on

>his own time.

> Until then, she could always interrogate... er, question
someone
else who might know the answers. "Yukie... they weren't
upset because

>you thought about withdrawing from their tournament or anything,
were
they?" Nabiki asked in a low voice as they left the grounds.

>
 Yukie shook her head in a negative. She was more or less still

>stunned that a human being could actually contain as much water
as
Soun apparently did.

>
 Nabiki had to admit that she was puzzled, if only for the
moment.

>Why would Dad cry this much, then? Something had to be up.

> Sending the three of them out on an ice-cream run was
nothing
more than a ruse to get them out of the house, she knew,
but what Dad

>had forgotten to take into account was that she and Kasumi were
no
longer children. It would take more than a bowl of ice cream to

>divert them from worrying about what might be going on.

> She thought about remaining behind to eavesdrop, then
thought
better of it. Where the two fathers were concerned, the
plots

>couldn't be *that* earth-shattering... could they? "Coming,
Sis?"
she asked, this time in a normal voice.

>
 Kasumi continued to lag behind. "Yes. In a minute."

>
 Nabiki brought the sketchbook she'd taken the time to bring
along

>into view. "Well, hurry up. I've got some preliminary
uniform
designs we can go over while we're waiting."

>
 Kasumi's eyes widened; Nabiki wasn't really considering going

>through with her 'fashion show' idea, was she? "I'm sure that
between
the three of us, we can find you a cute outfit yet,"
Nabiki grinned.

>"Right, Yukie?"

> Yukie remained in shock, barely acknowledging Nabiki's question.
It was a puzzle, all right - how one human body could store so much
>water to gush out in tides of tears. One word kept running through
her thoughts... Weird. Really, really weird.
>
 Kasumi closed her eyes and sighed.
>

>
 "So... why the sudden spurt of tears, Tendo-kun?" Genma

>hazarded. As if Soun needed much encouragement to break into an

exaggerated show of crying...
>
 "Quiet." Soun hesitated. "I must make certain that we are

>alone." At this, Genma and Ranma glanced at each other and shrugged.
What had caused Soun to suddenly start crying? Knowing the man, that
>could be practically *anything*.

> But... Soun had insisted that Kasumi and Nabiki leave - taking
Yukie with them - and was now going out of his way to make sure no
>one was eavesdropping on them. Could this actually be something

important?
>
 Ranma was the first to fall victim to his curiosity. "So,

>what's up?"

> Lapsing into his customary show of seriousness, Soun dropped

into his customary place at the head of the family-room table.

>"Well... I guess it's safe enough to talk, now. I have called you
here for a very important reason..."
>
 "And that would be?" Ranma asked a minute later; he'd never

>cared much for the Art of the Dramatic Pause.

> "The reason... would be that!"

> Soun gestured toward the far corner of the family room, where a
certain other "member" of the family had accidentally left behind one
>of his possessions. Ranma stared at the corner for a second or two
before finally noticing what Soun was trying to make them see.

>
 A pink bra.
>
 Rather large drops of nervous sweat rolled down the backs of

>Ranma and Genma's heads before joining the puddles already soaking the
floorboards.
>
 "You called us in here for THAT!?" Ranma finally managed to

>yell. "Don't tell me you're starting to become like the old pervert,
too!"
>
 Soun's angry head grew to fill the room. "HOW DARE YOU ACCUSE

>ME OF THAT, RANMA-KUN!" he yelled, the force of his act sending the

others tumbling to the floor. He recomposed himself. "Obviously,

>that... *thing* belongs to our Master."

> "Not that I want to make light of your concerns, Tendo-kun, but
couldn't Kasumi have accidentally dropped that while bringing in the
>wash?" Genma turned to glance at his son. "Or perhaps... Ranma

doesn't know how to properly put his clothes away?"
>
 "WHAT!?" Ranma shouted through clenched teeth, giving serious
>consideration to the idea of beating up his father yet again.
"That's
NOT mine! I don't have anything like that! I'm a guy!"
>
 Fortunately for the elder Saotome, Soun intervened, clearing
his
>throat. "What worries me is that the Master might choose to
pursue
our new student."
>
 "*Might*?" Ranma snorted. "Are we talking about the same old
>pervert here?"

> Soun chose to ignore him. "Yukie is a television star,
Ranma-
kun. If the Master were to... attack her, who knows what
the news
>media will make of it? Our shame will be broadcast throughout
the
entire world!"
>
 Genma gave his old friend a dubious look. "Aren't you perhaps
>going a little overboard there, Tendo-kun? Surely, the Master
has
harassed other important young women in his lifetime. However,
we
>haven't heard of anyone making more than the usual complaints, have

we?"
>
 "Well..."
>
 "Still," Genma ran a few of the possibilities through his
>imagination. "Maybe they would even consider making a 'movie of
the
week' about all this. I'll bet Sean Cannery would be perfect
to play
>me."

> Ranma and Soun took the opportunity to crash to the floor
in
sheer disbelief.
>
 "Saotome-kun! This is *serious*!" Soun insisted, while Ranma
>chose to bring the table down on his father's head. "We need
to
find some way to stop the Master from ruining our good
reputation!
>You two must help me!"

> "If we're going to pound the old man, I'm in," said Ranma.

> The lenses of Genma's spectacles took on a confident gleam.
"I
know exactly how we can deal with the Master."
>
 "Yeah?"
>
 "Really, Saotome-kun?"
>
 "An age-old tactic. Tried and true, used by many a great
>warrior." Unlike Soun, Genma had a better idea of how to use
a
dramatic pause. "We give the Master what he wants."
>
 Frowning, Ranma reached for the table again.
>
 "That's a wonderful plan, Saotome-kun! Why, if we can keep
>him preoccupied, we may never have to worry about him coming
near
Yukie again."
> "You're nuts! You've tried to do that a zillion times
before,
and it always fails in the end!" Ranma thought to remind
them.
>Unfortunately, he could tell that the two men had made up their
mind;
the only thing Ranma could do now was let them try their
'new' plan

>and watch it fail.

> "Now," Soun murmured, thoughtfully, "all we have to do is

collect all the lingerie in the house."
>
 Ranma rolled his eyes.
>
 "That includes all of yours, Ranma," added Genma.
>
 This, of course, was not a good thing to say to Ranma. "SHUT

>UP, OYAJI!" And in the next second, Genma was sent flying into
low
Earth orbit.
>

>
 "So... this is going to be a perfectly NORMAL martial-arts

>tournament, right?"

> "Hm? Yes, that's the way we planned it. Why?" Or better yet,
why
would anyone want to have an *abnormal* martial-arts tournament,

>if such things existed? The tournament's organizer was becoming
more
and more confused by the reactions the local businesses were
giving
>him. At least his contact - a woman by the name of Uchida

something-or-other - had treated the whole affair seriously.
You'd
>think they would be happy to have the tournament held here
again
after about a fifty-year absence.
>
 "Well, we'll be happy to offer whatever help we can, and
perhaps
>some prizes as well."

> The organizer nodded. "Thank you. Your support is
appreciated."

>
 "As long as you're absolutely *sure* it will be a *normal*

>tournament."

> "Absolutely." The organizer left the store, muttering under
his
breath that he needed to find a less confusing line of work.
>

>
 "So, you're saying that this is going to be a perfectly normal

>tournament, huh?" Ukyou asked, taking a careful sip of her
coffee.
Mine had insisted on taking her to one of the few trendy
'coffee
>houses' in the Nerima district. She'd never been in one
before,
telling herself that she didn't have the time, nor did she
want
>anyone alive to see her actually sitting in such a place. But
times
changed - though the thought never did cross her mind - and
she
>couldn't afford to be the Ukyou that she had previously been.

> Mine made an offhand one-handed sweeping gesture. "Right.
A
regional tournament where people come to qualify for the finals.
No
>cooking, gymnastics, huge hair razors, plush purple dinosaurs...

nothing like that."
>
 "I thought we wanted the 'special' martial artists. You know,

>the type who can defy gravity and toss ki around as if it was

nothing. Like the characters on those Dragonball shows, if they
were
>real."

> Mine took a sip of her coffee, unknowingly copying Ukyou's

earlier move. "We need what you'd call 'normal' martial artists,
>too; who better to fill the ranks of faceless minions or
expendable
grunts? Forces to provide support for the
monster-of-the-week."
>
 Ukyou grimaced at the reference. Until this point, she'd only
>heard it being used in regard to sentai shows and some animated

series... until she had made the mistake of using the term while
>discussing monsters with Mine. Now, the other seemed to enjoy
using
the reference.
>
 "Not to mention that a fair portion of those martial artists
>often have the potential to go farther than what their sensei
have
taught them. Too many people go through their careers in the
Arts
>never learning how to harness and use their ki because their
sensei
either didn't know how, or believed it to be too
dangerous."
>
 "Okay, that sounds reasonable. But why aren't we directly
>controlling the tournament? That way, we'll be better able to
gauge
all the entries."
>
 Mine sighed, covering it with a quick, bemused chuckle. "And
>attract attention to ourselves as we did with the last few
contests?
We need to be subtle, here. We'll let the tournament run
by itself
>and after that... we'll deal with the candidates later in private,
at
our leisure."
>
 "A simple plan," Ukyou agreed. "Maybe even one I wouldn't mind
>handling, for once."

> "You *will* be handling it," Mine's smile disappeared into
her
coffee, causing her to miss the disapproving glare that Ukyou
shot
>her. "You can use the experience. All you have to do is show
up,
hand out trophies, prizes and take names. How tough can it
be?"
>
 That was, Ukyou knew, the kind of question one asked shortly
>before something *did* go wrong. "Well, you never know..."

> "Don't worry! Everything will be fine!"

> "Yes," Ukyou hid her scowl. "I'm sure it will be."

> *****

> Yukie slowly picked apart her banana split - which was
unusual
for her, since she usually tore into most anything
remotely related
>to ice-cream dishes with a passion. She did have other things on
her
mind, however. "So, this martial-arts tournament isn't going
to be
>normal?"

> Nabiki smirked, also poking idly at her parfait. "Nope;
it's
never 'normal' here. Though, if luck's on your side, it could
be a
>martial-arts idol tournament."

> "Really?" Yukie asked in bewilderment. How could someone
fight
while dressed as an idol, in those stage costumes? Well...
actually,

>that depended on the costume. None of the costumes she'd been given
to wear during her career as a singer allowed for the type of moves
>she used during training, now.

> "I wouldn't doubt it. What do you think, Kasumi?"

> Kasumi, for her part, was preoccupying herself with her

shortcake. "Stop teasing her, Nabiki-chan. Now, you said you think
>my... uniform is weird?"

> "Huh?" Yukie became even more puzzled. She never thought that
Kasumi's Natsumi costume looked 'weird' - what was it with everyone's
>sudden dependance on the words 'weird' and 'normal,' anyway? To her,
the uniform was something she wouldn't have minded wearing on-stage.
>
 "Simple. It just looks too much like something you'd see on

>that 'Sailor Moon' series, for one. I really don't feel like having
to worry about the Bandai or Kodansha people coming after us for
>copyright infringements, Kasumi."

> "Mother seemed to think it was perfectly fine," Kasumi replied,
her voice showing a minute trace of annoyance. She assumed her mother
>had been the one to design or pick out the costume, and the concern

over whether or not the clothes resembled some animated character's
>costume and could lead to a lawsuit probably hadn't been on her

mother's mind at all.
>
 Those were the only conclusions Kasumi could draw, given what

>little she truly knew about what connection her mother had to her

transformation brooch. Her mother had requested it be given to her,
>and Kasumi seemed to be able to see her mother during her dreams...
but how much of the big picture did she truly know?

>
 Nabiki hesitated, trying to appear thoughtful. She'd wanted to

>change the costume to something unique, which would look good on

Kasumi and be perfectly marketable without any legal hassles. That
>was her reason for not liking the current Natsumi costume. It

certainly didn't have anything to do with her mother... did it?

>
 "I don't know, oneechan - a change in clothes might be neat,"

>Yukie chimed, if only to break the tension. "Maybe it wouldn't hurt
to see what Nabiki has in mind."
>
 "Well... I really don't know, myself."
>
 "C'mon, Sis. Aren't you the least bit curious?"
>
 Kasumi sighed. How much chance did she have of winning this

>battle? Oh, well. Despite Nabiki's insistence, she hadn't said
that Kasumi had no choice *but* to change her costume. "All right.
>I'll do it. But nothing revealing or silly, please. And remember
-
just because I've agreed to this doesn't mean I *have* to change my
>costume."

> "Fine, fine. Now, why don't we take a look at some of
the
suggestions I've brought with me?" Nabiki pushed her parfait
aside
>and drew out a few pieces of notebook paper from her pocket for

Kasumi and Yukie to study. The first was a drawing of a rather

>thin-looking two-piece that looked more like a stylized swimsuit
than
anything else. It featured a tight pair of bikini shorts,
along with
>an equally tight vest-like top... and the whole of it done in lime

green. Rounding out the costume was a medium-width belt that
ended
>in a holster.

> Both Kasumi and Yukie gaped at it. "Nabiki!" her older
sister
scolded.
>
 "And here I thought you wanted to avoid copyright problems,"

>Yukie quipped. "That looks like something one of the Lovely
Angels
would wear."
>
 Nabiki's only response was to raise an eyebrow.
>

>
 At that same moment, the man in charge of organizing the by-now

>infamous martial-arts tournament took a seat near the fountain
in
Hisakawa Park for a short rest. He'd been getting the same
response
>from practically everybody; all of them wanted to know if the
blasted
tournament was going to be a *normal* exhibition. Did they
even care
>that the district was going to be receiving the honor of hosting
this
prestigious event? The only two who seemed to treat the event
with
>respect was the owner of the Tendo School of Musabetsu Kakutou,
and
his contact - Uchida. Everyone else seemed to think it was a

>wonderfully huge joke, as far as he could tell. "What is it with

this place and their obsession with the word '*normal*?'"
>
 The sound of something dropping out of the skies and into the

>fountain behind him interrupted his rant, as did the sudden
tidal
wave of fountain water washing over him. He turned, wanting
to know
>exactly *why* he was now soaking wet.

> At first, the thing wedged in between the rim of the
fountain
and the statue at the center refused to connect to
anything in his
>mind. Then, it came to him. It was a panda. A living,
breathing
panda had fallen out of the skies, into a fountain full
of water,
>and drenched him.

> The panda noticed him. It drew out a wooden sign and began
to
write... [Help me, please?]
>
 "Normal, eh?" he said to no one in particular, suddenly

>starting to understand why so many people in Nerima were
worried
about things being perfectly normal.
>

>
 Mine was not happy.
>
 She turned the lights on in her apartment's living room.

>Why was it that meetings *always* ran longer than usual? Now, she'd missed the newest episode of her favorite TV series, *again*. She
>would have to ask Kyoko in Accounting for her tape of the episode.
Of course, Kyoko wouldn't be so nice about letting her borrow the
>tape - but then, weren't they all evil, anyway? An complaint or

two wouldn't mean much to Mine in the long run, as long as she was
>able to see what she'd missed.

> Her train of thought was interrupted when she saw that there
were messages waiting for her on the answering machine. She hit the
>Play button, heading to the refrigerator for a cappuccino.

> *beep* "Hi. Have we got a great deal for you. Only--"
Mine
quickly hit the Erase button. Damn telemarketers...
>
 beep "Uchida? It's me, Masa, from the K1 Music Division! I

>thought I'd give you a call to remind you of our tenth anniversary
party. We can't have it without you, you know! Now, I'm aware you
>couldn't attend last year's parties, but we're going to make sure you
join us this year, Mine. We're holding it on Saturday at the Ginza
>at six P.M. Hope to see you there!" *click*

> Silence.

> Mine set her drink on the counter before moving to replay the
message. Masa...
>

>
 Soun's thoughts were racing. His school faced a potential

>crisis; an important one if not crucial. Every last part of his mind
was concerned with inventing the perfect plan to deal with the crisis,
>and make sure that his honor - er, the *school's* honor remained

intact and unblemished.
>
 Except that he hadn't bothered to consider what *other people*

>might think of his extraordinary plans.

> "Are you crazy, Dad!? Absolutely not! I won't allow it!"

> "Akane." Soun fixed her with the best stern expression he could
manage. "We must do this to distract and stop our Master." Yes...
>Akane must see the merits of the plan. To get rid of the Master, all
they had to do was distract him with tons of lingerie, alcohol and
>food, then lock him away until the end of time. Blowing him up

hadn't worked much...
>
 Akane hated the plan. She glared intensely at him, a look which

>Ranma recognized all too well. And she wasn't as angry as she could
be, either - no, she wouldn't allow herself to get too angry toward
>her father. Most of the levels of Akane's anger beyond this point
were reserved exclusively for Ranma. "No, I won't have any part of
>helping you collect underwear for that hentai!"

> "But, Akane... think of what he could do to poor Yukie!"

> Akane scoffed. "And what would she think of her sensei stealing
a lot of girls' underwear to give to some old freak?"

>
 Point for Akane, Ranma thought to himself. With Soun so far
>behind in the unofficial score, he was likely about to bring out
the
big guns.
>
 Or, worse yet, the big tears. "AKANE!!" he cried, using a
>version of the traditional sad puppy-dog stare that might get a

four-year old almost anything he or she wanted.
>
 It was a pity Soun wasn't four years old.
>
 "You'll just have to come up with a better plan, Dad," Akane

>brought out her mallet to emphasize her point. She wouldn't use
it
on him, but hopefully the threat of being malletted would
inspire
>him to come up with a plan that *didn't* involve giving
Happosai
whatever he desired.
>
 "I told you, we can handle the old freak if he tries anything,"

>Ranma stated with an edge of cockiness to his voice. Happosai
hadn't
made his presence known in a while, which officially wasn't
a good
>sign, but Ranma couldn't wait to square off against him again.

Really, it was for the best if the world never had to worry about

>the perverted martial-arts master again.

> "B-but..." Soun could see that Akane wasn't going to change
her
mind anytime soon. "Very well. I'll leave it to both of you.

>Please insure that my trust has been well-placed," he finished as
he
left the room.
>
 A moment of silence passed.
>
 "Well, he gave up easily..."
>
 Akane banished her mallet to wherever it was she kept it.

>"Yeah. He's probably just glad he's gotten us to work together
for
the sake of the dojo. I don't like this, Ranma."
>
 "It's better than letting them give the freak what he wants and

>acting like cowards, right?" smirked Ranma. "Don't worry. We
can
take care of the old man."
>
 "It's not *him* I'm worried about."
>
 Ranma blinked. What could be a bigger threat to them at the

>moment than the old pervert? Then again... "We're doomed,
aren't
we?" he muttered.
>
 Downstairs, meanwhile, Soun sighed. "Forgive me, Akane, Ranma.

>I cannot leave this issue in your hands alone, just yet." He
turned
to face his partner-in-crime. "Saotome-kun, are you ready?"

>
 Genma hmphed. "I am ALWAYS ready."
>
 "Good." He carefully tied a cloth around his head to act as a

>mask. "I sincerely hope this plan works."

> "Tendo-kun, after we're finished, you'll wonder why we
didn't
bother to try this earlier."
>
 "We haven't?" Soun asked, momentarily puzzled. "Ah. Well,

>then, let's get to work!"

> As he left the house, Soun hoped that both his daughter and

Yukie would forgive him in the end. Genma, on the other hand, had

>let his thoughts return to the issue of who would play him in a

movie-of-the-week based on this whole situation. Oh, it'd be a

>wonderful movie, what with the espionage angle and everything...

> *****

> Yuu let his gaze wander about the stadium. "So this is where
the
tournament is going to be held, huh? Nice facility, I guess."
>He wondered why the tournament had never returned to this
particular
district within the last fifty years. The stadium was
certainly
>adequate enough... "I like the traditional look. We've been
using
too many cookie-cutter-type modern buildings lately."

>
 "Yes," the tournament's organizer agreed. Nothing like a

>*normal* martial-arts tournament in an unassuming stadium to
provide
a change of pace from all this talk of weirdness in the
district.
>
 "It'd be nice if the locals appreciated it more, though. They

>seem to have the weirdest opinions concerning the Arts and those who

practice them," Yuu groused, wondering if the confusion had
anything
>to do with all those Jackie Chan films. Since when did a
martial
artist use mustard as a lethal weapon?
>
 The organizer simply grunted his agreement, reminded of his

>little run-in with a surprisingly intelligent panda earlier in the

day. There was no way the animal could've been an illusion, a man

>in a costume or someone playing a joke with a mechanical panda.
He'd
passed by the same fountain later in the afternoon to see
that they
>were still repairing the damage caused by the panda.

> "This will be something for everyone to remember for the rest
of
their lives."
>
 What, exactly, would people remember? the organizer wondered.

>After seeing a panda communicate with him, he also had to wonder
what
would cause the entire district to be so concerned with
normality.
>Whatever it was had to be even more strange than a large panda who

communicated by using wooden signs...
>
 But even a panda wasn't much to get worked up about, and as the

>two men walked through the stadium's main exit they both had
assured
themselves that nothing could go wrong with this
particular martial-
>arts tournament.

> A few moments after their departure, a crash of thunder
preceded
the appearance of another pair of people. The first, a
young man
>with blue eyes who wore his brown hair short, looked to be around
the
age of sixteen. His companion, a girl who was perhaps a good
foot
>shorter than him, shared the same color eyes. She also wore the

same
simple training gi as the boy, providing a strange contrast to her
>medium-length green hair. A hazy yellow aura shimmering about them

both did its best to ease that contrast.
>
 "It's been a long time, oniichan. Do you think we'll be ready?"

>
 "I'm sure we will be. You can count on it."
>

>
 Kasumi stared, distracted, at the night sky. For a brief moment

>she toyed with the fantasy that the steam rising from her hot

chocolate could rise to join the stars, until the breeze dissipated
>the small wisp of smoke. She cautiously blew on her drink to help it

cool, then tested it by taking a quick sip.
>
 "Are you okay, Sis?" Nabiki asked, noticing her older sister

>set her cup on the deck and sigh.

> "Oh... yes," Kasumi dismissed the question, continuing to gaze
at the infinite arrangement of stars. "It's the stars. Don't you
you
>think they look beautiful?"

> Nabiki blinked. Kasumi had dodged a question; it wasn't like
her to be evasive. She rested a hand on her sister's shoulder and

>repeated her question.

> "I am fine, Nabiki," Kasumi replied. "Why don't you have a seat
and watch the stars with me? They seem particularly beautiful

>tonight."

> Nabiki noted the faint wavering of the wind chimes while she did
as Kasumi asked. Instead of focusing on the stars, however, she
she
>studied Kasumi's face. Behind what appeared to be contentment was
something Nabiki couldn't quite discern - something that was

>bothering her sister...

> "You haven't really answered my question," she persisted.

Kasumi's smile grew for a second or two in response, but then

>returned to the reserved smile that she had been wearing.

> For a moment, anyway. "Ah!" Kasumi exclaimed. "There, look!
A shooting star! Want to make a wish on it, Nabiki?" She turned her

>attention back to the shooting star. "I wish, I wish..."

> Shaking her head, Nabiki glanced from star to star to find what
her sister had seen. She found the trace of a line of white light,
>the tail of a meteor falling into the atmosphere. Past it - or

rather, everywhere around it - the stars continued to twinkle,

>unaffected and unconcerned. Events like this served to remind one
that there was an enormous universe outside of their world, Nabiki
Nabiki
>liked to believe.

> It was a shame such things often ended faster than she could
appreciate them.
>
 Kasumi stood. "I think I'll turn in, Nabiki. You can finish

>the rest of the hot chocolate if you like."

> Huh? Nabiki boggled. "You're not getting away that easily,
Sis."

>
 "Good night," Kasumi laughed, leaving Nabiki alone on the deck.

>

>
 It was not possible for the light of the stars to make its way

>through the windows of Mine's small apartment.

> This was or was not the result of some sinister manipulation,
depending on who you happened to be. Indirectly, one couldn't see

>the stars through her windows because there were some fairly large and
rather brightly-lit billboards doing their best to convince everyone

>the stars had simply given up and moved on to another location.

> There were a few things such as having large billboards shining
almost directly through one's windows that drove rent prices down;

>others included having large, fuel-driven vehicles barrel or fly
inches from your apartment at two fifty-five in the morning...

>neighbors who enjoyed tormenting you with their choices of music at
somewhere around the same time, or discovering that one's apartment

>just happened to be haunted or built on some sort of ancient burial
ground.

>
 Mine hadn't worried about any of those possibilities; no cars or

>planes could come too close because of the giant billboards. She'd
sold the neighbors their stockpile of music in the first place, and

>if there *had* been some kind of spirits roaming the area, she would
have tried to find a way to induct them into the BFC effort.

>
 For once, however, her mind wasn't concerned with the BFC.

>
 One of the billboards she could see from her windows had caught

>her attention, removing the multi-million dollar campaign ads
plastered on all the other billboards from her thoughts. Obviously,

>whoever had commissioned the ad hadn't paid too much for it, as it
was basically simple... record-company ads could afford to be simple.

>The ad was concerned with trumpeting the career of what it believed
to be the latest hot idol, some young woman who would probably only

>be famous for around six months.

> As she stared at the sign, the lights mounted atop the billboard
failed, leaving it dark in the presence of the larger, more expensive

>campaigns and companies. Party-crashers, the lot of them, Mine
had thought to label them. She didn't want their light, but there

>really wasn't much she could do about it.

> Except zap the other boards' lights with some dark power, though
that would run the risk of setting up a sign: "Youma Lives Here!"

>
 The light remained even after she closed the blinds tightly,

>forcing its way into her home, in her opinion. It would never
leave
her alone, always trying to make her accept it. Someday,
perhaps,
>the light of the BFC would outshine them all and she'd never have
to
worry about any of it again.

>
 She turned her attention to another light - the light of the

>small LED in the power button of her answering machine. "Masa..."

she breathed, repeating the name once more to herself. Was there
any

>place in this world where she could truly escape the light?

> *****

> [We now jump ahead in time five days. Those with
time-
displacement disorders, shield your eyes now.]

>
 It was a fairly busy afternoon in the shopping district, and
the

>heat of the sun was beating down in full upon the shoppers. Yukie

did her best to put the heat out of her mind, choosing to focus

>instead on the stock offered in the booth of one of the local
produce
vendors. The fresh oranges were a temptation, she had to
admit...

>
 She reached into her pockets looking for enough spare change to

>buy one of the fruits, but her mood was soon ruined by the fact
that
she hadn't bothered to bring any spare change with her in the
first

>place. "Aww... I'm broke!"

> "Need some money?" asked a familiar voice from behind her.

> "Nabiki-oneechan?" she exclaimed as she turned around,
coming
close to knocking over the display of oranges in the
process.

>"You'll lend me some money?"

> "Sure; I'll even give you a good interest rate, too," came
the
cheerful reply as Nabiki offered her enough money for two of
the

>oranges. "Oh, and don't forget, you've borrowed enough money to
buy
me an orange, too," Nabiki added, triggering a slightly
nervous

>twitch in Yukie's eyes.

> "But..."

> "Well, if you don't want an orange..." Nabiki reached for an

orange, bringing it closer to Yukie's face. "I mean, there's
always

>later, right? You can... *wait* for something just as delicious
and
satisfying, hmm?"

>
 Yukie's resolve crumbled. "Okay, okay. Fine! I'll pay for the

>oranges."

> A minute later, once Yukie was well into finishing her own

orange, Nabiki became serious again. "I hope you're enjoying
that,

>because we've got some work to do today."

> Yukie frowned, but hid it behind her orange. Was this
Nabiki's
way of talking people into doing work for her? "What kind
of work?"

>
 "Oh, just collecting on an old debt."

>

>
 "Ah, Miss Tendo. It's a pleasure to see you again," the young

>man in the business suit said in a polite manner, offering a bow to

the two younger women. "How may I help you this afternoon?"

>
 "I've come to collect on that favor you owe me, so if you don't

>mind, we'd like to borrow some of your costumes. Particularly
the
'magical girl' ones."

>
 The man studied Nabiki for a few seconds, then gestured to a

>rack of costumes in the nearest corner. "Of course; what you're

looking for is right over there."

>
 Yukie had to admit to a slight bit of puzzlement as she watched

>Nabiki make her way to the rack and pull nearly all of the
costumes
from it. How had this man come to owe Nabiki a favor? It
had to be

>a big favor, if it involved Nabiki borrowing a large array of

costumes from a fairly reputable studio... and without asking any

>questions. She'd learned from working on a low-budget sentai
show
that costumes were indeed one of the most important details
in

>production; what would happen if someone needed those costumes
and
they weren't there?

>
 Nabiki saw her expression and made a guess as to what she was

>thinking. "I recently provided this studio with some fight
footage
for one of its productions," she said in an aside to
Yukie, answering

>her unspoken questions somewhat. "They were quite impressed and said

that they owed me a favor, in addition to paying a decent amount
of

>money for the footage."

> "Well, we always welcome top-quality footage," the young
man
interrupted, having overheard the end of Nabiki's comment. He
rested

>another tall stack of costumes on a table close to Nabiki's side.

"I
mean, those building-to-building leaps looked almost real. The
price

>we paid was a bargain, considering how much we usually pay for those

kinds of stunts."

>
 Nabiki laughed. "Well, what can I say, really? I have good

>people working for me." The thought brought another nervous
twitch
to Yukie's face. If what Nabiki had said about the fighters
in

>Nerima not being normal, then she'd have almost limitless access
to
stunt-work normally only found in animation, not to mention
fight

>scenes that would make Jackie Chan look like a wimp. Of course,

another question that probably needed to be asked was the
question

>of what show or movie would bother to use the footage...

> "And here's a rack of costumes used mostly when we need idols,

but I don't think you'll need much from this rack." Yukie would
have

>none of that, though; she browsed through the clothes in delight,
and
soon there was another large pile of costumes on the floor
next to

>Nabiki's existing piles.

> "Er..." Yukie blushed. "I hope you don't mind,
Nabiki
-oneechan."
>
 Nabiki merely sighed, instructing the man to get a box for the

>entire array of costumes. "I guess it wouldn't hurt to have more
of
a selection to choose from."
>
 "I don't mind," the man said, "especially if it leads to more
of
>that excellent fight footage."

> Hearing that, Nabiki chuckled. "We'll see, we'll see...", she

quipped as Yukie dropped two more costumes onto the pile. It
seemed
>Yukie was beginning to get into the spirit of the situation.

> *****

>There are many laws in the universe, and most tended to be helpful
to
people most of the time. The Law of gravity was one of those
helpful
>laws, making sure that the majority of earths occupant stayed on
the
ground most the time (though sometimes the fall back to the
ground was
>quite painful). But there were a couple of less helpful laws in
the
universe, ones that were quite nasty to the people that where
effected
>by them. Tendo Soun was falling victim to one of those laws right
now.

>It was Murphy's law, and it was having quite a fun time with him
and
Saotome . For over the past 4 nights the 2 heads of their
respective
>families's had been on a mission, a mission to appease the demon of
the
household. A mission to prevent the demon known as Happosai
from
>wrecking yet more havoc on the good name Tendo.

>Of course the mere mention of Happosai's name really piqued
that
Murphy's interest didn't it, for when Soun and Genma hatched
their
>perfect plan to head off Happosai they ran into a roadblock. Many

roadblocks that is, all being very female, carrying rather large
brooms,
>and generally being very angry at the sight of two middle aged
men
stealing their underwear. Soun sighed, yes that Murphy enjoyed
them all
>right, making sure that the first panty raid they did with out the
help of
the master would go wrong.
>
Horribly wrong.
>
But they had persevered, for they had succeeded in acquiring
their
>'Sacrifice' for Happosai as Genma called it. For inside this
small
rented shed was the work of 4 nights, a room full of
panties. Happosai's
>dream home really, and with it they could at least delay the demon
if not
beat it out right.
>
Soun just shook his head in revulsion at the sight of the
panties.
>"The Path of the true Martial Artist is often paved with good
intentions.."

>"Ohayoo Tendo-kun!!" a freshly arrived bag introduced itself to
Soun,
causing him to react in understandable panic. "Hmm, are you
a little
>jumpy today Tendo-kun?"

>Soun reacted rather angrily at the bag's question, knocking it to the side to reveal the face of his partner in crime Genma. "Yes I am a bit
>jumpy...If we got caught in here we'd be...We'd be..."
>"Don't worry, I snuck in so nobody saw me and if they find this hiding place out when we aren't here they'll trace it back to Happosai not to
>us," Genma tried to soothe the tired nerves of his friend, noting that Nabiki was starting to brush off on him a bit.
>"But, why do we need more?"
>The reply came from Genma as he started to dump out the panties from
>his latest raid. "Well we don't know how much we need to sacrifice to make our master happy. It's better to be safe. Especially when..." a tense hush
>overtook Genma as he began to look at his latest wares. A small look of worry began to fall over him, as he slowly inspected one particular
>pair of panties. "It's as I thought, It isn't silk."
>A gentle breeze passed over the 2 men, followed by a rather painful face fault by Soun which he was nicely able to recover from in time to
>tower over his friend. "And why exactly should we care if it's not Silk!!" Soun yelled bombarding Genma.
>Yet Genma remained unphased, as he slowly pushed up his glasses before
>replaying. "Because Happosai may be a gourmet, so he might not like the fast food Nylon instead of the succulent gourmet taste of Silk."
>Soun went into another, more prolonged and painful face fault at

>Genma's reply. It sounded like his old friend was actually enjoying this, which lead to all sorts of unpleasant questions popping into Soun's mind.
>Which of course he didn't get to answer as Genma quickly disappeared. "Don't worry, I'll come back with more Silk stuff for our master!!" Genma's
>voice boomed, leading Soun to wonder where exactly Genma learned a trick like that.
>Slowly Soun picked himself up from his face fault and sat in a

>meditative position. He began to wonder if he was truly doing the right thing for Akane, Yukie and the dojo. He began to wonder what would happen
>to them if they were ever caught by the police. He also began to wonder just how much fun that Murphy bastard was having at his expense.
>****
>The time was 5:30 PM and most of Japan was heading home to supper.
>Only the hearty salary men remained at work, still dedicating their time to the advancement of the job. Mine herself was putting in some overtime,
>though she wasn't doing it for the advancement of the job. Nope, she was grinding the midnight oil for a completely different reason.

>"Mine-chan!!!" came a voice from the distance, one which cause a

>slight frown to appear on her face. Only one person had the gall to call her Mina-chan, and she knew full well what the person wanted.

"Masa..."

>she replied turning around to see her co-worker from the past walking
>towards her office. She sighed wishing she hadn't sent Ukyou home

>earlier. At least then she would have someone help her build up an excuse,
>maybe an important company project. But no, the only person in the office right

>now was Mine which kinda of put a hole in her company project excuse.

>"Mine-chan, your chauffeur for the night has arrived," the young man
>bowed, flashing a big friendly smile towards Mine. For her part Mine just

>sighed as she looked at Masa, who still basically looked the same after all
>these years. The slightly unkempt look was still there as part of his dress

>shirt was hanging out from his pants. She also noted that he still didn't
>wear a tie, though she noted that his face was clean shaven for a change. His

>brown hair was also cut short and wasn't hanging in front of his blue eye's
>like she used to remember. Still Masa was still the image of an

>incompetent and unreliable executive, an image which Masa destroyed time
>and time again by proving himself the best finder of music talent in the

>industry. That talent and a great work effort rapidly earned Masa his own
>dress code, and the respect of his coworkers. Even Mine's respect...

>
A small frown crossed Mine's face as she finished her train of

>thought. That was in the past, and she had the future to look forward too.
"Gomen Masa-san, but I'm afraid I'll have to decline your offer. Lot's of

>important work to do you see..."

>"What, in this empty office? I mean if it was important work you would
>of at least kept one executive around..." Mine sweat dropped at that,

>adding a mental note to herself not to let Ukyou go home early again. "I mean
>you used to keep me around late night when you did the overtime thing.."

>
"Well, this is only something I can do..."

>
"Well then you can put it off till tomorrow then," Masa smirked as

>replied. "You do know that it's my personal theory that Japan could
>benefit from an increase in membership to the procrastinators union."

>
Yet a small sigh came from Mine, before she coldly started to replay.

>"I'm sorry, but I must do this work tonight." With that out of the way,
>hopefully Masa would leave her alone Mine thought. But Masa didn't

>leave, he just lost a lot of the cheer on his face as he slowly looked deep
>into Mine's eye's. "You do know that a 10th anniversary only comes around

>once?"

>"Masa..."

>"And it's been so long since we've seen each other, I mean everyone
>from K1 thought you'd like to come along. But I guess I was wrong"

>Masa finished taking once last pained look into Mine's eyes. For her part
>she was trying to avoid the gaze, fearful for what Masa would

see.

>
"Ja ne!! Maybe we'll see each other at the 20th anniversary.."

>
A small tear fell down Mine's cheek, as she slowly got up to grab

>Masa's hand. It was after all only one night, so it wouldn't hurt to have
fun. "Wait Masa.." Mine muttered as she finally got a hold of Masa's hand.

>
"So you'll come?"

>
"Hai..." the understated replay from Mine more than returned Masa

>cheerfully demeanor. He quickly placed his arm around Mine's shoulder
and began to grin from ear to ear. "So this was a joke, trying to put one

>over old Masa, eh?"

>"Well..."

>"Well you must be punished for trying to put one over Masa," the young
man grin got even bigger as he looked at Mine's reaction to the statement,

>"and I know what the punishment is Mi-chan."

>"Oh Kami...Not that!!" Mine cursed as her face turned red.

>"But it's such a cute name Mi-chan!!!"

>"Yeah, well how do you like Ma-chan," Mine shot back with her own grin
starting to grow. But Masa didn't lose his grin, he just sat back and

>rocked on his feet as pushed the button for the Elevator.

"Ma-chan
doesn't fit me...I think Sa-chan is cuter Mi-chan!" The replay came, causing

>Mine to break out into full laughter as the two entered the elevator. And
the laughter began to fully wash away any doubts Mina had about going to

>the dinner, for she at least she was spending time with an old friend.

>****

>An odd silence fell over the dojo as Ranma and Akane watched Yukie
practice for the tournament to be held tomorrow. The two slowly began

>to wonder just why Soun wasn't here to help train Yukie, and all of their
thoughts led to mostly unpleasant situations involving their fathers.

>
"Well, did I do okay?" Yukie asked as she finished a rather basic Kata

>with out too much trouble. At least she didn't trip and fall down
doing the Kata like she did earlier in the month. It was a sign of

>improvement, and Yukie could use any sign of an improvement. Especially
if she got involved into a fight to the death with tennis rackets (as

>Nabiki seemed to think would happen.

>"Oh, you did okay," Ranma replied only half interested. He was angry
that Soun and Genma passed this work off to him, but then again this did

>lead to Ranma getting some experience teaching students. Something both
Akane and he would need more of before they would take over the dojo. That

>is if the two of them would ever stop fighting...

>"Okay, well I'm going to get cleaned up," the two stand in teachers
watched as Yukie ran off, a worried look crossing their face. It was

>Akane that decided to head of the upcoming silence first. "So, do you know
where dad and Genma are?"
>
"Have no idea..."
>
"And this doesn't bug you?" Akane said letting her anger slowly get
>the better of her. Ranma just looked at her with a slight miffed look,
like he didn't really care what there parents were doing. Which was probably
>implementing that less then tasteful plan Akane had shoot down 5 days
ago.
>
"I know how you feel, but I don't think they'd do that," Ranma finally
>replied in a slightly nervous tone. 'At least I don't think they
would' he added to himself.
>
"But when it comes to Happosai!!!" the danger level in Akane's voice
>went up a notch, though for a change not against Ranma. Inwardly Ranma
began to feel sorry for his dad and Soun, for if they ran into her like this.
>Well let's just say they better not have done that half baked plan.

>At that point Nabiki chose to interrupt Akane and Ranma's
conversation. "Ohayoo Akane-chan, Ranma-kun!!!" she cheerfully said as
>she walked into the room.

>"Hello Oneechan!!" Akane replied, taking her mind off the impending
problem of Happosai and her father. "How can we help you?"
>
"Well you can help me by leaving the dojo the tonight. Here," the
>young capitalist held out her hand to reveal a rather decent sized pile of
bills. "It's what I owe you for the Pog incident. Go out and eat dinner and
>watch a movie okay!!"

>Ranma and Akane blinked as Nabiki handed over the money wondering if
Nabiki lost her sanity. They knew full well that the 'Pog Incident'
>(which is what Nabiki called it) resulted in no money for Nabiki and a hulk
of melted rubber consumes for Ranma and Akane. But just right now Nabiki
>had handed over a decent amount of Yen, called it profit and told them to
go out to eat. It wasn't even an offer, it was more of a demand Ranma
>thought as he started to count the bills...

>"Well that was weird," Akane finally added breaking out of the shock
of the incident, "So what do we do?"
>
"Well, I think we should go out and eat. It's not often we get a free
>meal."

>"But, why did Nabiki give us money?" was the only question Akane could
ask out loud among the glut of unspoken questions. 'Does this have
>something to do with Happosai' Akane asked to herself before laughing it off.
Happosai never touched Kasumi and Nabiki for some strange reason and
>Nabiki wasn't told about the fear of Happosai going after Yukie.
Unless...
>
"Look, let's not analyze this. We've got money for free food and a
>movie so let's enjoy it..."

>"Hai...It would be nice to go out. Though.."

>Ranma leapt up as he suddenly got on to Akane's train of
thought.
"Yeah, it's getting strange here, too strange," Ranma
muttered as they left
>the dojo. The tension of Happosai was getting to them and that's why
Akane
was one edge, Ranma thought. Their fathers rarely did
anything strange though,
>unless it involved Ranma and Akane getting closer together..

>As if on cue, a small bolt of lightning flashed in the otherwise
calm
sky as Akane had the same thought as Ranma. And the both of
them both
>shared a look of dread as to what tomorrow held for them.

>*****

>If the Tokyo Ginza had one claim to fame in the annals of
Tokyo's
restaurant and bar history it was the fact that it offered
a very good
>price on Sake. In fact it's Sake price was the cheapest in
Tokyo,
maybe even in Japan. This was of course done for a reason
as drunken patrons
>rarely complained about the prices for the food, which was
more
expensive than the average restaurant in Tokyo.
>
But the cheap and free flowing Sake made for wild parties, and
these
>parties where the cornerstone of Tokyo Ginza's reputation. Many
a
company lost a day's worth a work due to the infamous Tokyo
sake, where the
>employees would let loose at least for one night during the year.

>And it was because of this reputation that the 10th anniversary of
the
K1 music division decide to book a booth at Tokyo Ginza. A
booth and lot's
>of Sake....

>"And so in order to meet the deadline for the press conference they

pulled a cute looking girl off the street and lead her to the
press
>conference," an already slight sloshed young lady recounted, "And
imagine
the shock of the record company when they found out I
couldn't sing." The
>young lady went red in the face after finishing that statement,
reaching
over to down yet another glass of rice wine.

>
"Well, we couldn't let you go Mami, I mean you are one of the
better
>CD cover artists out there," a sober voice came from the
doorway
heralding a new arrival to the party.
>
"Masa-san!!! When did you get here!!" Mami hiccuped in replay to
the
>newcomer before downing yet another glass. "And besides I'm not
only
the best cover artists I'm also a damn good promoter too. I
can't believe I
>actually sold 100,000 copies of my own record. And I couldn't
sing
either."
>
"Doesn't matter much with idols really, the industry can make
them
>like McDonalds makes hamburgers." another member of the party
chipped in
as he also reached for more sake. "And the thing is
they don't have to be
>good either. I know I hate McDonalds food yet I still manage to eat

there."

>Masa just let out a hearty laugh at the final comment, "Well I happen
to like cute idols and believe that they can make great music." Masa
>paused as he gauged the reaction of his audience, finding them more interested
in the Sake than in him. Thus he decided to bring in the big guns, "Oh
>well, let's not talk about Business at a time like this. It's time for a fun
and I brought a surprise."
>
The small crowd hushed as Masa lead another person into the booth, the
>two of them slowly sitting down as the hush to learn looks of shock. Mami
finally had the courage to speak to them, "Mine-san??"

>
"Hai," Mine responded with in a hush wondering how her former
>coworkers would react to her presence. Another silence griped the partiers for
awhile, which left Masa no choice but to interrupt it. "Yup, I was able
>to break Mi-chan away from her schedule so she could get drunk with us."

>"Wai!! Mine-san is here," Mami responded quickly hugging her old
co-worker, " Or should I call you Mi-chan..." the young girl grinned
>at the comment knowing full well that she could call her former boss
almost anything right now because of the sake.

>
"Mou...I really don't like that name, I don't know why Masa-san
>started to use it."

>"Maybe because it suits you Mi-chan," Masa added in-between his Sake
drinking, "It's such a cute name and your so Kawaii in your business
>suit." A small bit of smoke rose from Mine's head after that comment
followed by rather sly grin from Mine as she slowly started to talk,
>"Mi-chan may be cute, but Ma-chan is even cuter!!!"

>
"Ma-chan!! Oh, that does fit you now doesn't it Ma-chan!!!" Mami
>giggled as she started to pour another glass of Sake. "Here Mi-chan, drink
up!!!"
>
"But I think Sa-chan is cuter," Masa added in an indigent tone, taking
>the offered Sake from Mami before Mina could take it. "Don't you agree?"

>"Nahh, I like Ma-chan much better," Mine added as Mami started to
giggle. "And just for taking my Sake I'll keep calling you that Ma-chan!!!"
>
"Ah, what can I do," Masa replied in a good nature laugh as he

>started to pour Mina another glass of Sake, "Except get you all drunk and hope
you forget Ma-chan!!!"
>
"Ma-chan!!!" The group yelled as a whole, causing everyone to break
>into laughter. Even Mine who was starting to drink with the rest of the
group. And for the first time in her life since K1 was bought out 5 years ago
>Mine was actually having fun.

>****

>The Tendo dojo was empty except for 3 people, which was exactly how
>Nabiki wanted it. She had given a decent pile of money to Ranma and Akane to
>leave the dojo and she was lucky that she didn't have to do the same
>for her father and Genma. But then any money spent on today was an
>investment that would be paid back in full once Natsumi's new costume took the
>market. After all with another costume Nabiki could make another
>action figure line, more posters, more idol card, and so on.

>"Okay, it looks like the coast is clear Yuki, Kasumi-neechan!" Nabiki
>said as she entered the training area of the Tendo home. In side the room
>where Yuki and Kasumi, the latter of which was looking at the choice in
>uniforms which she was going to wear later in the night. "I'm not sure about
>this Nabiki, none of these seem practical."

>"When have magical girl uniforms ever been practical?" Nabiki asked
>not really expecting an answer from the girls. "Besides it's not like you
>have to wear this uniform all of the time. Just a couple of fashion shots
>and a poster session and you can go back to the old one."

>
"Really?"
>
"Really," the replay from Nabiki came in a small sigh. She didn't know
>why Kasumi was attached to the old costume, there wasn't really a
>sentimental value to it. At least that's what Nabiki thought, going into
>a bit of a brood as she looked at Kasumi. It wasn't like she was trying to
>force the change on Kasumi now was she.
>
It was Yukie who decided to chip into the conversation as Nabiki

>continued to think, "Besides I think a fashion show would be cool
>Kasumi-neechan, and I especially want to see how you'd look in some of
>those idol dress's." The statement was finished with a small laugh and a
>growing smile on Yukie that managed to melt away Kasumi resistance to the
>idea. "Hai," she managed to say as she went behind the screen which was
>her temporary changeroom. Behind it where a pile of costumes labeled by
>numbers ranging from 1-18. Kasumi's brow furrowed a bit, Nabiki wasn't
>really planning on making her wear all of these.

>
"Which number are you starting with first Kasumi?"

>
"Number 3," Kasumi mumbled in replay to Nabiki's question.
Number 3
>didn't look too bad Kasumi thought, at least from here.

>"Number 3?" a curious Yukie asked looking at Nabiki's widening grin,
>"What's number 3?"
>
"You'll see, You'll see," Nabiki giggled in replay as Kasumi slowly
>came out from behind the screen in Costume #3. The costume looked a lot like
>a wedding dress except that instead of a long flowing dress the bottom
>was replaced with a small pleated skirt. The colour was all white

with
pink ribbons on the long white gloves and in the middle of the top. Thin
>white fabric flowed from a tiara in the hair and reached down to the floor
almost. Topping it off was a pair of medium length diamond earrings and
>a hint of make up on the cheeks which accented the frown on Kasumi's
face. It wasn't long after Kasumi came out that the assembled crowd decided
>to break up into laughter.

>"Minna!!" Kasumi chided as she went behind the screen. Slowly the
giggles died down as Nabiki offered up yet another suggestion. "Try Number
>10!!"

>A few minutes later and yet another round of giggles sent Kasumi back
behind the changing screen. Number 10 had looked liked a pink nurses
>uniform with a cap placed in the hair. A long flowing scarf was
wrapped around the neck finishing off an ensemble which Yukie thought would
>look incredibly cute on a 11 year old girl. Of course Kasumi's wasn't an
11 year old girl...
>
"Try outfit number 6," Nabiki commented as she checked off yet another
>uniform on her list. "No wait, scratch that. The Muyo look is out this
year so let's try number 18."
>
"Nabiki-neechan, do you think this one will work?" Yukie managed to
>ask between her laughs.

>"Maybe, because after all this was one of the one's you picked out,"
Nabiki replied as Kasumi slowly emerged from behind the changing room
>screen for a third time. This time the uniform was bit more simple
with the skirt being a straight skirt with no ruffles in it. The top was
>also a bit simple as it was skin tight yellow fabric that turned into a bow
on at the top of the arms. A pink bow was around the neck and straps held
>up the body of the dress with a pair of yellow gloves finishing off the
lemon colored ensemble. Yukie took a good look at the dress and started to
>sweatdrop before speaking. "Well, It looked Kawaii on me..."

>"That's it, I'm out of here," Kasumi muttered as she started to leave
the room in a decidedly un-Kasumi like way. Both Yukie and Nabiki looked on
>in a semi-state of shock as Kasumi left the room.

>"Oneechan"

>****

>It was half way through the party, and enough Sake had been consumed
to make the average elephant sloshed, or maybe 2 elephants. Mine herself
>had consumed a fair amount of alcohol and was her face seemed to be in a
permeant shade of red, much like the only other 2 people that were
>still semi conscious at this point in the part. A small giggles game from
Mami as Mine started to pour yet another class of Sake, perhaps pushing the
>amount of Sake consumed to make 3 elephants drunk. OR was it 4....

>"So I was saying, we were turning out Idols like hamburgers for a

few
years there," Mami hiccuped as she took another gulp of Sake,
"But
>then you found this one talent and blam were up to the top."

>Masa just grinned as started to drink some water, giving up on
the
sake long ago. He knew when to draw the line, especially after
some of those

>wild college parties lead to some rather incriminating pictures
of
him. "But if it wasn't for Mi-chan we would still be an idol
company

>really. She had the vision to turn us into something else and
because of that
we were able to succeeded beyond all of our
wildest dreams."

>
"Yeah, and she kept me around Ma-chan, even after my idol
career. She

>really liked us idols. Treated us a humans not as factory
assembled
toy's for distribution."

>
"Well, you did have some talent that I just couldn't do with
out,"

>Mine replied as she downed yet another Sake bottle, "You managed to
sell
a lot of your CD's even when we knew they weren't top
quality. That's

>talent."

>"Well if it wasn't for Ma-chan and you, the company would be broke
by
now. But instead you got that big company the BF-what ever to
buy us out

>and, and.." Mami tried to finish but the alcohol finally put her to
sleep
leaving a sighing Masa and Mine remaining awake. And with
the amount

>of alcohol Mine was drinking she wasn't going to remain awake for
long.

>"Waiter!!!"

>"Yes sir,"

>"Would you please call a cab to take the rest of the party home,"
Masa
paused to hand over a decent amount of bill's and a sheet of
paper to the

>waiter, "This should help cover it."

>"And what about the lady that's still drinking Sir?"

>"I'll take care of her." The waiter bowed as he walked away
leaving
Masa to sit next to Mine. Slowly placing his hand on her
back, Masa leaned

>down to whisper in the ear of Mine. "Time to go to Mi-chan!"

>"Ma....-ch..an"

>A broad friendly smile passed over Masa lips as he helped Mine
up.
"How many time's have I told you that Sa-chan is cuter than
Ma-chan."

>
"Ma-chan," Mine continued as if ignoring Masa's request, "I wish
I

>never made that deal with the BFC. I wish I stayed with K1 for the
past 5
years."

>
A slight look of shock passed over Masa's face as he slowly lead
Mine

>out the door. The deal with the BFC was kept the company afloat
and
enabled the company to become one of the better music
companies in Japan. Not

>just Idol singers though, but a whole host of music. And Masa
thought Mine
was happy with the deal, happy that the company was
doing well and

>producing the kind of music they all wanted to produce 10 years ago.

But then
again it could always be the Sake talking Masa reasoned as he opened the car door for Mine.
>Yet Masa still thought something was wrong as he slowly entered his
car, gently shutting the door behind him. Mine wasn't one to lie when she >was drunk so if she really had a problem with the BFC. "So where too
Mi-chan?" >
"Ukyou's...I mean Ucchan's," Mine replied as sleep overtook her, >wondering why she wanted to go to Ukyou's place instead of her own home.
>"What, you want okonomiyaki this late at night?" Masa joked only to see
that the target of his joke was fast asleep. "Ah...Okay, Ucchan's it >is." A quick turn of the wrist and the car came to life, it's engine slight
purring to the night sky. As he slowly turned onto the road, he >smiled and whispered silently to himself, "Mi-chan".
>****
>The stadium was dark except for the bit of moonlight that seeped
through the windows to illuminate part of the floor. The preparations for the >tournament were complete and the stadium was ready to go for
tomorrow's big event. So were the two spirts, who were sparring in the middle >of one of the tournament mats. The young man with the short brown
hair and the training Gi unleashed a rapid flurry of punches which were >blocked by the young girl with Green hair.
>"Nyaaa, can't you do better than that Kakeru-niichan!!!" the young
green hair girl mocked as she launched a round house kick at the Kakeru. The >kick was blocked but the young girl quickly followed up with a foot
sweep which Kakeru jumped over. >
"I'll do better when you start to do better Yume-chan" the young boy >laughed only to be interrupted by a jumping Yume who grabbed his Gi and
proceeded to Judo throw him into the ground. "Ha!! Showed you Niichan!!!" >Yume taunted only to see her brother turn around mid throw and spring
back up from the ground into a jump kick. A stunned Yume only had time to >place up her hands for a partial block as the kick furthered her decent to the
floor. >
"Owww, Niichan!!" >
"Hey, it's called sparring Yume-chan!!" >
"Well you don't have to do it so hard Niichan!!" Yume yelled as she >slowly got up, dusting herself off. Her brother just flashed her a quick V
sign before taking up another fighting stance, "Well we do need the >training."
>"Do you think will be read Kakeru-niichan?"
>"Oh will be ready," Kakeru smiled as he slowly approached Yume, "That
we can count on!!!" >
**** >
The wisps of moon light slightly caressed Kasumi's face as she looked >down at her normal dress. A slight tear formed in her eye, a tear

for what
she did earlier and tear for their mother.

>
"Oneechan?" Nabiki asked as she peered into from the entrance way of

>Kasumi's room. "Are you okay?"

>Kasumi sighed as she looked at the figure of her sister, wondering why
she stormed off like that earlier. It wasn't like her costume was too

>important her, except for the fact that it was from her mother.

>"Oneechan?" Nabiki asked again, breaking her from that train of thought.

>"What is it Nabiki?"

>"Are you all right Kasumi?" the short haired business woman asked
looking concerned for her older sister. Kasumi seemed to be distant over

>the last little while, especially when it came to talking about her
costume. It was as if Kasumi didn't want to get rid of it, but she didn't

>know why. "It's because the costume came from Mother, right?"

>"Nabiki!!!"

>"Well is that the reason?" Kasumi just looked deep into the eye's of
her sister after she asked that question, and she slowly started to cry a

>bit as she began to reply. "Yes, it's just that the mother gave this to
me and I don't want to lose another part of her." And with that Kasumi

>was in full tears on her bed, turning her eye's away from Nabiki in an
awkward motion.

>
Nabiki herself felt awkward, wondering how best to comfort her sister.

>She didn't really know that her sister felt that her old costume was
from her mother and if she did she wouldn't of forced a new one her.

>"Oneechan," Nabiki started in a soothing voice, "I know how much mom
means to you. She means a lot to me."

>
Nabiki paused as she felt her eye's start to water. Holding the tears

>back she once again meet Kasumi's eye's and slowly started to talk again,
"And I would never try and take anything away from you that reminded you of

>mom." With that Nabiki placed a sketch on the desk and started to
slowly leave the room, this time the tears flowing freely from her eye's.

>"That's the costume I was going to suggest for you. It has some armor
to protect you and I know mom wouldn't want you to get hurt, or me for

>that matter. I just put together the fashion show to help you relieve some
stress." With that Nabiki left the room completely, leaving the still

>crying Kasumi to look at the drawing for the outfit."Nabiki-chan...
Mother" Kasumi sighed as she looked over the design, grasping her

>broach. Slowly she put her hand to the sky and shouted out "Love power
TRANSFORM"

>
Outside of Kasumi's room, Nabiki slowly started to walk down the

>stairs slowly getting her tears under control. Yukie was at the bottom
looking up at her with a look of concern. "How is

Kasumi-nee-chan Nabiki?"

>
"She's fine," Nabiki replied with a voice of concern only to see

>Yukie's eye's go wide with excitement. "Nabiki-nee-chan, behind you!!" Yukie
exclaimed causing Nabiki to turn around quickly.

>
Behind her was Kasumi in her Natsumi form but upon quick look one

>could see that her costume was different than her usually Natsumi form. Her
Boots where a mid length lace up boots in a lime green colour. Her skirt was

>pleated 3 layer variety with each layer having a different colour
between lemon and lime. Her body suit was now a pure lemon colour, with a

>chest armor plate that went to up to the shoulder and was lime green. In
the middle of the plate was lemon yellow bow in the center laid the broach

>which had a the Kanjii for love inscribed in it. To top it off was a
short pair of lemon yellow gloves and a ribbon that held Kasumi's hair in a

>loose pony tail. Nabiki looked on in awe, that costume did fit her but
how did she change into it. Natsumi offered no answers as she smiled down

>at Nabiki, her eye's still slightly watery from before.

>"Mother approved Nabiki-chan!!" Kasumi cried as she went down to hug
her sister, who returned the embrace as best she could. "But, but," Nabiki

>tried to form her question in between the shock.

>"I don't know, it just happened when I transformed. I guess that means
mother does approve" Yukie looked on as the two sisters hugged, glad

>that they made up. It was nice to have family that cared about you, and she
was slowly starting to feel like she was part of this family.

>
"But we still have one more thing to do!!" Nabiki exclaimed as she

>broke free from Natsumi's hug.

>"More of the fashion show?"

>"Why yes Natsumi!! But since we found your costume Yukie will be the
model now!!" Nabiki exclaimed flashing a big smile Yukie's way.

>
"Oh no, your not getting me into that Wedding dress outfit!!" Yukie

>pouted before joining the other two girls in laughter.

>****

>It was late at night, and Ukyou was sitting in her kitchen table
looking over the details of tomorrow's plan. It certainly wasn't too

>difficult, just pop in hand out an award and takes one names for future members
of the BFC. But if there was one thing Ukyou believed it was that things

>could always go wrong no matter how sound the plan was. It was one of
the few things she took over from her past life...

>
A loud knock on the door broke Ukyou away from her thoughts though it

>created a bunch of new ones. Like who would actually be knocking on
her door this later at night for instance. Though this didn't bother Ukyou

>much these day's since she was more than capable of taking care of

herself. Even more so than when she was...
>
"Who is it?"
>
"Usubei Couriers...I've been instructed by Mine-san to deliver her
here
>here!" The voice responded in a half joking voice. Now why would
someone be
delivering her boss, Ukyou thought as she slowly opened
the door
>readying to attack the visitor at the first possible moment.

>"Moshi Moshi!!" The young man responded as he lead in Mine into
the
premises's, " I hope you don't mind but she asked me to drop
her off
>here."

>"No I don't" Ukyou responded, trying to hid any intention that
she
planned to attack the young man, "What happened?"
>
The young man just smiled as he handed Mine over to Ukyou, "Mine
had a
>little too much to drink at a party so she asked me to bring her
home.
You'll be alright won't you?"
>
"I'll be fine!!" Ukyou than bowed to the young man, " I thank
you for
>taking the time to bring her here."

>"No problem, Mata ne Mi-chan!!!" Ukyou shut the door closed
silently
as the young man finished his good bye's. Well, this was
another thing
>that could go wrong Ukyou grumbled to herself as she carried Mine to
her
guest room. "Ma-chan..." Mine muttered as she Ukyou placed her
down in the
>bed. Ukyou silently closed the door, before she started to shake her
head.

>"It must of been some party that's for sure."

>*****

>*Present day*

>The stadium was packed for the Tokyo regional martial arts
competition,
though the crowd wasn't exactly pumped for the event.
The lack of
>excitement could be do to the fact that exceptional martial arts
fights
happened daily in Nermia, or from the tension of yet more

>property damages resulting from the usual rough housing. What ever
the
case the crowd was quiet, dead quiet.
>
Not that Ukyou cared, all she had to do was stick around for the
Black
>Belt bracket, the cream of the crop of not only Nerima martial
arts
but the surrounding distracts as well. Unfortunately to get
the good part
>she had to stick around for about 6 hours of white belt action which
was
like watching 60 minutes of Van Damme to get 10 minutes of
Bruce Lee. No,
>this would not be fun, Ukyou thought cursing the fact that Mine had
just
conveniently came down with hang over before this event. But
Ukyou had
>to be diplomatic for the sake of the company and that meant making
small
talk with the organizer. "Ohayoo Yuu-san," Ukyou bowed
maintaining a decent
>level of politeness.

>"Ohayoo," the man respond with a look of slight displeasure on
his
face, "Excuse me but wasn't Uchida-san supposed to be here?"

>
"She is delayed at the moment, but she will be here later for the presentation of the medals for the black belt competition."

>"Ah, well it doesn't matter anyway, We're just glad we have some
local corporate support" Yuu chuckled as he started to talk with the men that >where with him. Ukyou let loose a barely audible sigh, if they just
wanted the corporate money then why did she have to be here. They could just >take a list of names a contact the winners later. They didn't have to go
and ruin....

>
"Nani?" Ukyou asked out loud as she felt a strange presence in the

>room.

>"Pardon me?" one of the suits next to Yuu asked looking at Ukyou with
a worried brow.

>
"Nothing, I have some business to take care of. If you would excuse me

>gentleman," a polite bow soon followed as Yuu waved Ukyou off. Slowly
walking away the presence once again returned to Ukyou. 'It's a weird.

>I feel as if there is some danger near by, could it be that magical
girl' Ukyou thought to herself as she walked into the recreation lounge.

>Their plans were air tight and the BFC name wasn't even announced publically
with the event. They where just sponsoring the black belt round, so how

>would that magical girl find out about the plan. Well Ukyou was soon to the
answers to her questions as she located the source of the presence,

>and it was coming from the basement. Quickly closing the doors behind her,
Ukyou smiled a devious smile while thinking about how interesting things

>would soon get.

>As the door shut one of the front doors quickly opened. For walking
through that door was the entire Tendo dojo party, missing Genma and

>Soun. And it was for that reason Akane and Ranma had worried looks on
their faces. For they were expecting anything from there fathers, be

>it a fight to the death with Happosai or the nth pathetic attempt to get the
two of them to marry. Yup, the young fiancée's had a look of pure dread on

>their faces as they walked in to the stadium. "I'll go register Yukie,
You help her warm up," Akane said as she started to walk over to the

>table.

>Ranma quickly turned around to look at the other members of the Tendo
family who came with Yukie today. Both Nabiki and Kasumi looked like

>they were enjoying themselves though Yukie had a slight nervous look on
her face. But then Ranma chalked that up to first tournament jitters, even

>though none of the fighters really scared him. Even the one's that
owned their own Dojo. Still Yukie was a white belt and this tournament was a

>good first step even for a casual student in the art. "Yukie, come with me
and I'll help you loosen up for your fight, ne?"

>
"Hai," the less than enthusiastic replay came from Yukie who was
>wondering on just how she was going to deal with rumored martial
arts Jazz
dance team Nabiki was betting on being here.

>
"Then go over to the training area and wait a while," Ranma said
as he
>looked at Nabiki and Kasumi. "So, why are you two here?"

>"I'm here to cheer Yukie on of course," Kasumi replied cheerfully
to
the question, an answer that more than satisfied Ranma's
curiosity as to
>why Kasumi was here.

>"I'm here to make some money on side betting of course,"
Nabiki
grinned as she answered Ranma's question, an answer that
more than satisfied
>Ranma's curiosity as to why Nabiki was here. She was here to make
money.

>"Ranma!!" Akane yelled, "We've got to go help Yukie loosen
up!!!"
Ranma flinched, one plus of all the mayhem with Genma and
Soun meant that
>Akane and Ranma where getting along better than the usually did.
Though that
was mostly because they where worried about their
fathers than
>insulting each other. Still Ranma did want to go an entire week with
out getting
malletted so he decided to do the diplomatic thing, for
once. "I'll be
>right over. Have fun you two."

>The Tendo sisters looked on as Ranma waved good bye to them and
then
they slowly made their way to there seats. "So do you think
Yukie will do
>good in the tournament Nabiki?"

>"Well she does have help from Ranma-kun so it shouldn't be
too
difficult," Nabiki quickly turned the gears in her head to
come at a reasonable
>odd's for the tournament fight, and quickly inspected Yukie as she
started to
do her practice Kata's. "I give 100-1 odd's of winning
her first fight."

>
"Nabiki-chan!!!" Kasumi shook her head at her sister, she needed
to
>have more faith in Yukie. Though she did hope the young girl
wouldn't get
hurt, but then that's what Ranma and Akane where
there for.

>
For their part Ranma and Akane where watching Yukie stretch but
their
>minds where on different things. Mainly their fathers. "Ranma,
what
about..." Akane tried to ask Ranma before he put his hands
over her
>mouth.

>"Just don't ask," a nervous grin appeared on his face as he talked
to
Akane, "Don't tempt fate today, or else will be sorry." Ranma
slowly
>took his hand away from Akane's mouth and watched as she had a look
of
understanding on her face. Nothing would go wrong if they
didn't say
>anything could go wrong.

>"And now for the first round of our competition which will be
white
belt Females"

>
"Wish me luck Ranma-san, Akane-san!!!" Yukie exclaimed with a
bit of

>fear in her voice. She didn't want to run into the Jazz dancers in round
one, or the rumored combat mime. She just wanted a nice normal opponent.

>
For their part Ranma and Akane just looked at each other, feeling of

>unspoken dread slowly taking over their bodies.

>*****

>Of course the cause of their dread was far across town in the middle
of Tokyo's suburbs (though Ranma and Akane didn't know that.). Genma and Soun

>were slowly hatching phase 2 of their evil plan to appease their demon master.
"I don't know Saotome-san, but I don't think this will work."

>
"Relax Tendo-kun," the elder Saotome said as he adjusted his

>handkerchief, "this will be the final blow to Happosai. With this will be
able to bring him down forever."

>
"But don't we have enough underwear already, so why do we need to go

>for yet another set of bras!!!" Soun screamed as they tried their best to
sneak up on a lone bra in the midday's light. The fact they where on

>the ground and the bra was on the 4th floor still didn't seem to sway
Genma's mood.

>
"It's not just any bra, it's a complete Silk mix and it's a name

>brand," Genma replied, "One of those Kline Calvin brands. With this will bring
down Happosai!!"

>
"But we already have enough!!!" Soun whispered in a very angry voice,

>wondering why he was hunting for women's underwear in the daytime and
why Genma knew so much about the subject. Perhaps the master was starting

>to rub off a bit on Genma.

>"Heh, this is easy pickings for someone as skilled as me!!" The boast
was soon followed by a jump up to the tree followed by a leap to the

>branch. "Come on Tendo-kun!! It's easy pic...AHHH!!" With a loud thud Genma
fell in to the balcony where the tempting prize was hung. And for the first

>time in weeks Soun did the sensible thing, he slowly backed into the
bushes and hid.

>
"Tendo-kun?" Genma asked as he looked around the balcony and into the

>apartment, seeing for the first time the occupants of the domicile. And
for such a small apartment their seemed to be many residents, almost 20

>women with rather large brooms on their shoulders. Genma took a quick cough
before speaking up to the gathered crowd, "Ohayoo Minna-san!!!"

>
"He fell for the bait, Get him!!!" one of the ladies yelled as the ran

>out onto the balcony slowly introducing their end of their brooms into
Genma's head. From the ground Soun grimaced as he heard Genma crying

>for help, tears pouring from his eye's. "The path of true martial artist
is filled with danger Saotome, you travel it well."

>

>
Kakeru frowned, "Why do the tournaments have to start with the

white

>belts first? They should start with the black belts first."

>"Well if they did that then the crowd would go home early."

Kakeru
frown deepened as he looked at Yume, knowing full well that she was right.

>"Yeah, I know...But I don't have to like it."

>Yume sighed as she paced around the Dojo, slowly giving into her
brothers impatience. "I wanna do something!!! Let's get some snacks!!" The face

>of her brother met the ground at that statement, followed by a quick
recovery in which he towered over his sister.

>
"Excuse me, but who are you?" came a voice that wasn't Kakeru's, which

>perplexed Yume. Quickly turning around she saw a young women with Long
brown hair dressed in a red business suit. Yume also noted that she

>had a rather angry expression on her face, one that obviously didn't mean
well.

>
"And why do you want to know?" came the answer to the question for a

>slightly more composed Kakeru.

>"Well I just want to make sure that tournament is completed without any
mishaps," Ukyou's eye's narrowed a bit as she looked at the 2 young

>people, "You aren't planning to do anything now are you?"

>"Maybe we are, and maybe we aren't. What are you going to do about
it?"

>
Ukyou grinned at that statement, "Why I'm going to stop you!!!"

>

>
The PA system blared to life, ready to announce the next match. "Next

>Round 1 match is the Satski Dojo vs the Tendo Dojo." A small rumble
went through the crowd at the announcement of the Tendo dojo, whose name was

>synonymous with chaos and entertainment even in the white belt level.
A small cheer went through the crowd, the first so far in the

>tournament (except for the polite cheers from family members) as Yukie entered
the ring.

>
For her part Yukie was nervous for even though her opponent looked

>normal she still had the vague feeling that something weird was going to
happen. er opponent also looked worried, though for a different reason all

>together. The name Tendo was known in some parts of Japan, and it's
reputation scared all but the strongest of Dojo's.

>
"Go for it Yukie-chan!!!" Kasumi yelled as the referee finished giving

>the initial instructions to the two competitors. The two bowed and slowly
made their way to their corner's of the mat. A small gulp was taken by

>both of them before the signal to go was given.

>Yukie charge forth with a simple straight kick that her opponent
managed to dodge. A quick counter with a straight punch soon followed along

>with a quick snap kick that Yukie managed to avoid. A small pause of relief
>soon feel over her as she noticed that nothing weird was happening at least
>so far. But the breather was short lived as Yukie rushed in with a quick
>punch, followed by a rather sloppy looking roundhouse kick.

>
>Which was quickly dodged by her opponent, who also took a chance for a
>breather. She noted that none of the weird stuff the Tendo dojo was
>famous for had been used in the match. No mallets, fireballs, or any other
>weird things. It was just a plain normal match, and that wasn't supposed to
>happen with a Tendo trained student.
>Two loud Kya's filled the air as the combatants ran into each other,
>grabbing onto each others gi's. Ranma and Akane both showed looks of
>worry, though not for Yukie. They knew that nobody really got hurt at
>these tournaments and that Yukie should be all right. There were more
>worried about what any other spectator may cause in mayhem.

>
>Quickly leaning forward Yukie tried a modified Judo throw on her foe,
>still worrying about whether or not she was going to break into the two step
>in the middle of the fight.
>Countering the move, her opponent quickly lifted Yukie up in a counter
>throw. A move she especially worked on for this tournament, a move
>which would be useless if any mallets came out.
>Ranma and Akane gasped as Yukie's shoulders were slowly thrown towards
>the mat. Now was as good as time as any for the usual interruption to come,
>and the two prepared every excuse in the book to explain them.
>The crowd went into a hush, what would happen next in the match. Would
>the Tendo student flip out and use a Ki attack like most Tendo students
>could. But the anticipation of everyone was met with the soft thud of
>Yukie's shoulders hitting the mat.
>"Ippon!! Time up, Winner Satski dojo!!" The referee screamed as almost
>half of the crowd went into a partial face fault. They had just
>witnessed a first in Nerima, a perfectly normal martial art's fight.
>
>"Ite!!!" Yukie cried as she was helped up by her smiling opponent. She
>returned the smile, and bowed to the victor adding a cute "Thanks for
>a good fight" for good measure.
>Turning to leave the mat she could see the Tendo family run up to her.
>Kasumi looked like she had a mixture of worry and relief on her face.
>"Don't worry I'm okay!!" Yukie sighed as she still felt a bit stiff
>from her fall, though Kasumi did look less worried.

>
>"You did good for what you've learned," Akane added with a look of
>relief on her face, one which Ranma shared. "Of course it would of
>went better if we spent a little more work on throws." Yukie just giggled as

>slightly stuck her tongue in replay, a move which even got Ranma to laugh
a bit.
>
"We'll I don't know about you but I don't wanna stick around here all
>day. Let's say we go out to eat, ne?" Kasumi asked, not really wanting to
stick around for the rest of the event. A feeling which Ranma agreed
>with surprisingly, "Yeah, let's go get something to eat Okay!!"

>"Why Ranma-kun," Nabiki teased, "I thought you'd like to stay and
watch some more martial arts."
>
"Well I would if it was a the black belt part, but even then it's
>nothing I haven't seen before."

>"Well I guess it does get boring if it's just normal martial arts and
not something like martial arts cooking," Nabiki added, drawing yet
>another curious look from Yuki.

>"Ranma-san, you really took part in a martial arts cooking contest?"

>"Which one," Ranma laughed beginning to break out in story, "I've
taken part in many." The 4 girls just sighed, not wanting to hear another
>inflated story of Ranma's amazing exploits.

>*****

>Ukyou slowly gazed into the eye's of the two people who stood in front
of her. Just from meeting them she could see that they weren't magical
>girls or anything like that, they seemed more like spirits. But they still
wanted to interrupt the contest, and the BFC wouldn't allow that.
>
"Heh, She still wants to fight Yume-chan," Kakeru laughed as he looked
>at his opponent. "She doesn't look too tough so I'll let you have a go at
her."
>
"Thanks Oniichan!!" the younger girl exclaimed as she took up a

>fighting stance across from Ukyou. "I hope you know we've been haunting this
location for over a 100 years, disrupting any martial arts tournament.
>If any one can beat us than we will finally be able to rest in peace. And
I really doubt you will be able to do that."

>
"Why don't you try me," Ukyou grinned, reading to let loose on the two
>foolish spirits that would dare to involve themselves in BFC business.

>
Though Yume just smirked in replay and started to run towards Ukyou.
>Taking a Quick blocking stance Ukyou was rather surprised when Yume did
a quick headstand and placed her legs around Ukyou's neck.

>"Hurricarana!!" Yume yelled as she tried to pull Ukyou forward but couldn't.

>"Ah, your supposed to help me do the move ya know?" Yume yelled at
Ukyou, who had a slightly red face. Her brother had red face too, and a
>sweat drop. All of which lead him to tower over his sister.

>"Don't you know wrestling is fake!!!"

>"But, I always wanted to do that move," Yume cried as she jumped out
the head stand leaving a still stunned Ukyou. "It's just so cool when the
>girls on TV do it."

>"Sigh, You should really stop watching TV you know," Kakeru sighed as
he looked at Ukyou. "Gomen Nasi, but I'll be fighting you now." Kakeru
>entered a similar fighting stance which his sister had, but Ukyou
noted that he was not moving in. Slowly moving his hands to his side, he
>quickly pushed them forward and yelled out "Hadoken"

>The alarm of a watch went off in the background and a bird took off in
flight as both Ukyou and Yume looked on in shock. Kakeru looked

>forward and laughed at his hands as he was unable to send forth any Ki in a
fireball form. "Rats, I thought I learned the Hadoken last time!!!"
>
"Oniichan!!! What did I say about playing fighting games!!!"

>
Kakeru just looked at Yume with a smile. "But I got it down!! Wait a
>minute" Kakeru exclaimed as he produced a control pad and handed it to
Yume. "If you do a fireball motion while I point my hands out it
>should work."

>"I don't know what a fireball motion is!!" Yume cried in mid
sweatdrop, throwing the control pad down. "You and that stupid

>game..Ack!!!" Yume screamed as she dodged a quick flaming spatula.

>"Are you done playing yet?" Ukyou grinned as she produced 2
more
flaming spatula's. "Because I'm ready to fight!!"

>
Suddenly the demeanor on Kakeru and Yume went serious, their forms both
>glowing yellow. "So, you have some power!! A mix of spiritual power
with the Ki of a Human. You should be a fun fight," Kakeru added in a
>rather emotionless voice.

>Ukyou just grinned and prepared to throw the spatulas when she was
stopped by one voice. "What are you doing Ukyou-san?"

>
"Uchida-san!!" Ukyou cried, "When did you get here!?"

>
"Just a little while ago. So what's the deal with these two?" Mine
>turned to face Kakeru and Yume, both of whom had a rather serious look on
their faces.
>
"Uchida-san, we are haunting this tournament and Ukyou-san tried to
>stop us. We found her a worthy opponent so we are going to fight her."

>Mine laughed at the replay, "Well it doesn't matter anymore, the
tournament is over."
>
"What!!" Kakeru and Yume yelled, "But it's only been...3 hours since
>we've faced down Ukyou!!!" Kakeru cried, noting that time flies when your
having fun.
>
"Yup, and this was a short tournament. We'll be leaving now so you can

>do whatever you like," Mine laughed as she pulled Ukyou along with her,
noting that she really needed to teach Ukyou the method for youma

>exits.

>As for Kakeru and Yume, well they just sat in the middle of the floor
with stunned looks on their faces. "Yume-chan, I think we should go haunt

>some place else,"

>"Okay!!!" Yume-chan exclaimed, instantly producing 4 ready to go
suitcases. "Let's go to some place that has a real good retail

>district okay!!! And a good Manga shop!!!Wai!!!"

>Kakeru sighed, they really were going to be here for eternity.

Oh
well, they could always look for one of those famous martial artists they

>heard about in the tournament. And that would mean they wouldn't have to move
far from Nerima, or his favorite arcade. "Come on Yume, were going

>Apartment hunting!!"

>"Wai!!!"

>*****

>"And so I ended up using flour to distract him and while I did that I
hit over 100 times!!" Ranma exclaimed as he sat next to Yukie who was

>listening in interest. Either Ranma was a good story teller or Nabiki
didn't have to go far for her footage.

>
"And did I tell you about the time I had to use a cake pan to fight

>off 10 guards." Yukie continued to smile, they were good stories and Ranma
was nice even though he had a bit of an ego. But Yukie didn't feel like

>more martial arts today and she just wanted to tear into her banana split
and.

>
"And in the news today," The music in the background changed to a news

>report which seemed to interrupt Ranma's story. "Police found a
collection of a Women's underwear in a local mini-storage facility. Details are

>sketchy but police are looking into numerous suspects."

>Both Yukie and Nabiki looked on as both Ranma and Akane went pale.
"Nahh, It couldn't be," the two laughed as they started to eat there fries

>again only to be interrupted by yet another noise which sounded like a horde
of women chasing after someone. "Please don't let it be who I think it

>is, don't let it be him!!!" Akane and Ranma prayed to the Kami's, only to
have their prayer smashed as the figure ran past the window.

>
"Hello Son, Akane-kun, Minna!!!" Genma yelled as he ran past the

>window, the pursuing women not far behind. Both Akane and Ranma went into a
face fault on the table as Yukie looked on curiously.

>
"Oh My," Kasumi finally added breaking the silence, "But it's nice to

>see Genma finally getting some exercise!"

>This only worsened Akane and Ranma's face faults....

>****

>"So we pulled it off Mine-san?"

>Mine smiled as she looked at the names on the list, the names of

the
future of the BFC. "Yes, and in one weeks time will be meeting them
>again to give them their cheque. And after that..."

>"Heh, I get the idea," Ukyou laughed as she went into her room, "Can I
get you anything by the way?"
>
"Yeah," Mine paused, "Some more Sake would be nice!"

>
Ukyou took the chance to face fault as she entered the room, closing
>the door behind her. Mine took one more look at the list before going to
the fridge for one of her jolts. Stopping by the door, she let out one
>more sigh before looking at the sun light.

>"Ma-chan...."

>***** End of Part 6

> [ED: "Friends" (Nabiki Tendo Version)Takayama Minami]
>

End
file.